

Greetings from

MOUSE HOLEAVEN

A Guided Tour of
THE MEL BIRNKRANT COLLECTION
VOLUME TWO
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COMIC NODDERS

When the Comic Nodders were “officially” introduced, one way that they were merchandised was as a complete introductory set, in a plain red box. There were no graphics on the cover, and just the character’s names were neatly printed, inside, beneath each figure, which was held in place by one continuous length of thread. There had been a few odd figures leading up to these, but this was the formal beginning of the Comic Nodders as a fully realized vehicle for bringing the Comic Characters out of the pages of the Funny Paper, and into the Real World, in three dimensional form. Entire families of Comic Character Nodders grew from here. 1928 was the year.

This is that initial introductory set of 12, just as it was, 85 years ago. The figures have never been removed from their allotted places. The thread is all original. Is that not some kind of Miracle? This photograph, which looks as real, as if, the object, itself, was here before your eyes, is presented actual size!



This Incredible series of bisque masterpieces are currently known as “Nodders”. That is, most likely, a misnomer. I don’t believe they were intended to nod at all. Their heads, which, for the most part, are separate, and held in place by a thin elastic cord that begins with a knot on top, then travels through a hole in their head, down their neck and out through another hole in their rear end, where a second knot is tied, were intended to be posed, not nod. This enabled their heads to pose. It is amazing how expressive this simple touch of pose-ability can be. Unfortunately, over time, the elastic loosens up, and, sooner or later, the heads begin to nod.

Seeing that these figures were created in the late 1920s , by the time they came to the attention of a growing number of collectors in the early 70s, there was lots of nodding going on. And antique dealers, as well as collectors, began to call these delightful figures “Nodders”. Real Nodders, of course, were a different matter. They had springs, or counter weights, and were intended to nod. Comic “Nodders” were Not!

I’ve thought about Comic Nodders a lot! They exemplify some of the joys and disillusionment of collecting, because they are not open ended. There comes a point when one can get them all. On the way are days of fun and wanting, “needing” to complete the set. And then when that goal is reached ... Its over! There’s no place left to go. The getting is the fun; the owning is, largely, a liability.

Having voiced that observation, I’ll get back on track, and talk about that incredible series of mini monuments, now known as Comic Nodders. The sculpting here is simply fabulous! And clearly, with the possible exception of the very first ones, they are the work of just one artist. What a Guy! What an Eye! This is what I’ve theorized, perhaps a better word is fantasized: The sculptor, most likely, lived in Germany. He didn’t necessarily know who many, if any, of these American Comic Characters were. Therefore, his vision was not clouded by personal knowledge or feelings about any of them. He was handed a newspaper and simply asked to sculpt what he saw, with Total Objectivity!

I cannot say enough about how wonderful these are, but I’ll try. They hit the perfect note of simplicity and keen observation. Here is the essence of each character, not the superficial details, but the core elements, the body language, the posture, the attitude, the personality and, above all, the shape.

Nodders are grouped in families, Some of these family groups are small; Orphan Annie was an orphan, after all. She had her Daddy, and her doggie Sandy, and that was about it. On the other hand, huge gregarious families like like the Gumps, Moon Mullins, and Gasoline Alley went on forever, because they were so rich in characters and popularity. In every case, the sculptor has captured the essential look and feeling of each one. The contrast between each member of a family, and the other family members is refreshingly objective.

Look at Uncle Walt, for instance. He is delightfully rotund; his abstract shape is almost round, standing next to Auntie Blossom, the contrast is extreme. The two shapes play off, against each other, and, at the same time, go together, like the symbol of the 1939 World’s Fair The Tryon, and Perosphere. To see these figures all in line is a study in sharp contrasts. The abstract shapes of their various silhouettes reveal a level of objective observation that is amazing. I love the selflessness of this man’s work. It’s not about him. It’s about the characters! And this lack of personal expression unifies and diversifies the line. And that is his identity, his total objectivity.



Now, let's look at all the Nodders. They are displayed in one long line, starting with some that I included, who might be pushing the envelope a little. Even though, some had moveable heads, and some did not, they might, or might not, have been part of the category. Once we get moving along, we will get to Family groups.

When I built "The Wall" I already had them all, all the known Nodders, and I could count and calculate to give each figure just enough space, and devise one long showcase to hold them all. The lighting's lousy. Sorry about that; it's the best the space would allow. Years ago, when I contemplated a book, I planned to photograph each family of nodders, standing on a floor and background that would be an actual page from the strip they appeared in. I had all the matching comic pages, and still do. There simply isn't time for all that, now.



Beginning with some that are off the screen, above, because I couldn't squeeze the camera in, is Santa Claus. He has a moveable head. Then Little Annie Rooney. Her arms move. She comes in several sizes, all the way up to a full sized doll, created by Joseph Kallus. The strangest thought just occurred to me. Could Kallus have done the Comic Nodders? I know he sculpted the bisque Kewpies. If he did, that would explain a lot. Next is the conundrum of Mutt and Jeff. They came in three sizes, the smallest are below. They are too tiny to truly be part of the Nodder set. All had moving heads, and all were in the style of Nodders. In the next photo we will see the medium sized set. They are just a little bit too big to comfortably be in scale with the rest of the Nodder families. Here, as well, are Barney and Sparkplug. They don't belong here, but I just love this figurine, so here they are.



Next, is an adorable set of Hans and Fritz, the Katzenjammer Kids. If I don't put them here, then where? And then, a Nodder pair, the Tennis Ball Man and the Golf Ball Man by John Hassall. He created an amazing series of images with either balls or eggs for moveable heads. I have some fabulous large examples, elsewhere. And then there are the midsize Mutt and Jeff, just a little too big to truly fit in.



There were some previews to the coming of the Noddies. One was a series of four bisques that were advertised and sold together as a group, even though, they did not quite go together. The 1927 Sears catalogue, a year before the Noddies appeared, sold these as a set. The four figures were Snowflake, by the illusive Oscar Hitt, more about him later, Bonzo, Buttercup, who was Toots and Casper's baby. He had a moveable head. A piece of black elastic thread that held his head in place, became his single strand of hair. And, last, was Mickey McGuire of the Toonerville folks, with a weed made of brown elastic in his mouth. The following year, Buttercup's moving head feature was applied to Noddies.



The first figures in the pre-1928 Comic Nodder series did not have moveable heads. They did have a tendency to display an involvement in observing something. Jiggs and Maggie, for instance, and Dinty Moore as well, seem intent at looking at something off to one side. It is interesting to see what just the turning of a head can do to contribute to an impression that a figure is thinking, involved in something, and alive. The turned heads of these early figures might have had an influence of why the series that followed had poseable heads. A figure, staring blankly forward, can look trance-like, and catatonic. A figure involved, with its head turned to one side, looks more alive.

Happy Hooligan was the transition. He was the first figure, clearly in the earliest sculptor's style, (chunky with bulbous noses) to have a moveable head. He was also the last figure in that early style. I believe the rest of the nodders were sculpted by someone else. Notice there are a pair of Mutt and Jeff here, as well. They are, clearly, part of this first set, and in that style.

In the heyday of collecting these, Happy Hooligan became the Rosetta stone of Noddies, the key to all heads being moveable in the future, the missing link. And he was known to sell, when he could be found at all, at a premium price. Oh, those were the days! The collectors, who I used to know, who were impassioned by the quest for Noddies, are all gone now. Some have completed their sets. Others have simply given up, and moved on to other things. Still others, have Nodded off for the last time.



Here is "Our Gang", as it was in the days before Spanky, Alfalfa and Buckwheat. These were added to the Nodder series in 1930. They are the only figures that are not officially Comic Characters. Starting on the left are, Pete the Dog, Wheezer, Jackie Cooper, Chubby Chaney, Mary Ann Jackson and Farina. Eunice gave me this set for Christmas, in 1967.



Next is the "Nebbs" family, by Sol Hess, beginning with Junior Nebb, who proved to be one of the rarest Nodders, and the most difficult to find. He was the one missing the longest from most collections. Then come Rudy and Fanny Nebb, followed by Ambrose Potts, De Long Jones, and Max.



"The Gumps" by Sidney Smith is the one of the three largest Nodder families. First is the Widow Zander, then Uncle Bim, Andy Gump, his wife, Min, and their son, Chester Gump, followed by Tilda, Ching Chow, and last of all, the Old Timer.



“Winnie Winkle” by Martin Branner, begins with Mr. Bibb, then Patsy, followed by Winnie, herself, looking very glamorous, and her brother Perry Winkle. Last of all, are Pa and Ma Winkle.



“Moon Mullins” by Frank Willard is one of the largest Nodder families. Starting on the left with Lord Plushbottom, then, Emmy, Mushmouth, Kayo, and Moon, followed by Aunt Mamie, Uncle Willie, and Little Egypt.



“Harold Teen” by Carl Ed comes next. The characters are Grandpa Teen, Lilacs, Josie, Lillums, Harold, and Pop Jenks. Josie was one of those who was really hard to get.



The largest Nodder family was that of Gasoline Alley, by Frank King. Rachael, Skeeze and Uncle Walt were part of the initial introductory set. They were joined by Aunty Blossom, Corky, Avery, Mr. Wicker, Bill, and Doc.



Here is Harold Gray’s Little Orphan Annie, along with her dog, Sandy, and Daddy Warbucks. Here, too, are Walter Berndt’s “Smitty” and his brother, Herbie, along with the boss, Mr. Bailey and Scraps, his dog. Smitty seems to be the only inconsistently proportioned figure in the entire Nodder set. His head is so disproportionately large! Yet, his body is consistent with the look and feel of the other Noddors.



Last of all are “Just Kids” by Ad Carter. The Characters are, Mush, Marjory, Fatso, Nicodemus. and Pat Finnegan.



This is essentially the entire set. There are a few slight variations, that various collectors have discovered. Skeeze, for instance, comes in two versions, one with his hands behind his back, and another with his hands behind his back, holding an apple. From the front, they are the same. Variations like that do not interest me, and thus they are not something I pursued.

Displaying these was always a problem. Doing them justice here is a problem too. After experimenting with showing them oversized, I changed my mind and made them actual size. What I can't convey is the impression they give, all in a straight line. But, as I already took photos, trying to do that, I'll post the entire lineup in three sections, and see what that looks like.



Well that's not too bad. The lights, although only 4 watts each, really are too bright. Last of all, this is how the showcase appears, in context to The Wall, itself, ... a blazing streak of white!



KRAZY KAT

George Herriman is considered to be one of the greatest comic artists of all time. The profound mystique of his masterpiece, "Krazy Kat" has defied description, although many high-toned writers, among them the poet E. E. Cummings, have praised, and tried to analyze its curious mixture of surrealism, slapstick comedy and poetry. It has also defied translation into the world of film, and toys as well.

William Randolph Hearst, owner of The New York Evening Journal, where the strip first appeared, in 1913, absolutely loved Krazy Kat. And his personal liking for it kept this never wildly popular strip alive, until Herriman died in 1944. The unconventional love triangle it depicts, between "Krazy Kat", a masochistic idealistic Kat, of indeterminate gender, a sadistic brick hurling mouse, "Ignatz" that she/he adores, and "Offissa Pup" a well-intentioned agent of the law in "Coconino County", who is in love with Krazy, and has assumed the role his/her protector, flew over the heads of most of the public. Much like "Peanuts", later on, Krazy was directed at adult readership. But, unlike Charlie Brown and Snoopy, for whom all that changed with the advent of TV, Krazy Kat never caught on with kids. Therefore, there were few toy products made.

As a licensed property Krazy had two lives, not nine, two distinctly different manifestations of the Kat's complex personality. The first took place in 1916 when a series of dolls appeared. These were as much adult novelties as they were for kids, and limited popularity, as well as the fact that 1916 was 97 years ago, make these dolls extremely rare, today. Here is an ad that appeared in the November issue of "Playthings," heralding their introduction, in limited supply, just in time for Christmas. "THE BIG SKREAM, Kraziest Kat You Ever Looked At", it reads. Esoteric excerpts from the strip run down the borders of the page.

I'll never forget acquiring my first Krazy Kat doll. The way it came to me was almost mystical. The day before I was heading up to the May opening of the second year of Brimfield, I got a call from a toy dealer who offered me a felt Krazy Kat doll. I had never heard of such a thing, but he described it fairly well. The price was a ridiculous, 150 dollars. In 1969, that price was totally outrageous. It might as well have been 150 thousand. Naturally, I said, "No thank you".

PLAYTHINGS

KRAZY KAT

THE BIG SKREAM

KRAZIEST KAT

YOU EVER LOOKED AT

\$12.⁰⁰ DOZEN

TWENTY INCHES TALL
MADE OF FINEST FELT



PATENT APPLIED FOR
MANUFACTURED UNDER EXCLUSIVE ARRANGEMENT WITH
THE ORIGINATOR, GEORGE HERRIMAN
A LIMITED SUPPLY READY FOR DELIVERY
DECEMBER 10th
ORDER NOW
AVERILL MFG. Co.
37 UNION SQUARE
NEW YORK

18







Courtesy of the N. Y. Evening Journal

November, 1916



Courtesy of the N. Y. Evening Journal

The following morning, found me racing through the fields of Brimfield, just as the dealers were beginning to unpack. Suddenly, I saw it, sticking up from the tall grass, something skinny and black, a tail with a bent end! I knew, instantly, what it had to be! Lying face down in the weeds, was a 12 inch doll of Krazy Kat. The price was one dollar! Needless to say, I paid for it, as fast as lightening, trying not to openly squeal with glee. I was a happy kitty! It was, as if, the dealer who called the day before, did so, solely, to teach me how to identify this doll. It was the 1916 version, the smallest of four different sizes. Here he stands, on the far left side of the showcase, below. These early dolls all have stump-like hands, feet, tail, ears and nose. The eyes are merely holes in the white felt face. Through a middle hole, protrudes a long stump of a nose.



Krazy Kat was never "all the rage", and his/her brief popularity, was due, largely, to the fact that Krazy was the only Kat around. It came to an end, abruptly, when "Felix", a much more user friendly cat, blew into town.

Around 1930 Krazy Kat came back to life again, sort of like a feline zombie, resurrected from the dead, thanks to the advent of "sound". Now, his persona changed, and he became decidedly male, with a voice like Mickey Mouse, and much of Mickey's personality, as well. This was a lame attempt to generate a property that could take advantage of, and compete with, the popularity of Mickey. This time around, Krazy had two things going for him, name recognition and sound. He was introduced in a series 26 new sound cartoons, distributed by Columbia.



So, once again, new dolls appeared. These were made by Knickerbocker. Curiously, although, designed more in the going style of 15 years later, they bore a stylistic kinship to the earlier version, particularly the strange eyes of the 1916 dolls. In both incarnations, the eyes consisted of nothing more than holes in the white felt fabric of the face, with a layer of black fabric, underneath. And the nose still emerges from a hole in the middle of his face. There are three sizes of these in the showcase. The two larger ones have stuffed hands and the smaller one, as well as the Ignatz dolls, have hands that are flat, cut out of felt. The 1916 dolls came in a variety of colors, while the later ones were only black and white. Knickerbocker also made some dolls of Ignatz, often mistakenly identified as Mickey by inexperienced dealers and collectors, alike. There are three of those in the showcase, too.

My favorite doll artist, Joseph Kallus also designed and manufactured (Cameo Doll Company) a fabulous Ignatz doll. It can be seen here with its delightful original box. Ignatz's arms, legs and tail are electrical wire, while his head and body are cast in composition. Jaymar also made a black and white wood jointed mouse that is often erroneously thought to be Ignatz by wishful thinkers, who are not in the know. In its original box, it is simply called "Mouse".



J. Chein & Company made a group of Krazy Kat toys, as well. Here is the smallest version of the 1930s doll, holding a Krazy Kat sparkler by Chein. Another Chein toy is Ignatz riding on a tricycle. The showcase also contains two wood jointed Krazy Kat dolls by Chein, with toothy grins. Chein also made two "Krazy Kat" windup toys which you will not find in my collection. The advent of sound quickly wiped silent Felix off the silver screen, when sound cartoons became the rage. So Chein recycled their Felix windups by simply incising Krazy Kat's name. These were merely Felix the Cat toys, relabeled as Krazy Kat. The toys, themselves, remained the same.



On the back wall of this showcase is a rare Einson Freeman Krazy Kat mask. They also made a matching paper mask of Ignatz, which I have never seen. All in all, the contents of this single showcase contains all the Krazy Kat items, of which I am aware, except for a wooden Chein pull toy of Krazy in a locomotive that I had many opportunities to buy, but always at a price that seemed too high. Apart from that, and other color variations of the early dolls, blue, purple, green, etc , that's. pretty much. all that was made.



There must have been other items, as well, that time erased. One surviving remnant of Krazy's heyday is this sheet music, "The Krazy Kat Rag", with cover art that incorporates an early drawing by Herriman

KRAZY KAT

RAG



By
BEN. RITCHIE



5

In the early 1970s, I corresponded with a pioneering comic art collector, Murray Harris. Murray began collecting comic character art, when he was 5 years old, well before anybody. The most unique aspect of his collection was the fact that he had been sending blank post cards to all the famous comic strip artists, all his life, and they sent back their autographs, often accompanied by a drawing. In 1973, Murray commissioned a Krazy Kat sculpture in bronze. It was intended to be a limited edition of 25. They were to be cast, one at a time, as orders came in. I thought the sculpture was terrific, and ordered one, immediately. So early, that I got sculpture number one, which was already done, so, I didn't have to wait to have a copy made. I don't believe the run was ever completed. I know he sold, at least, one more, for sure, as it was purchased, at my urging, by Harry Kislevitz. The inscription reads: "Apologies to Herriman Deter & Richard Myer for Murray A. Harris 1/25 (meaning number one of 25) 1973".



There were many attempts to adapt Krazy to the movies. All of them missed the mark. The complex relationship between Krazy and Ignatz was never fully explored, and in the later sound cartoons, it was ignored, and eliminated, altogether, as Krazy assumed the role of Mickey Mouse. His most distinguishing feature, now, was the fact that his ears were small and square, while Mickey's ears were large and round. Herriman, apparently, was not involved with any of these cinematic adaptations.



I'm in the Talkies Now! —

—and I'm talking the language of the Box-Office in the greatest series of comedies in my whole career... Dialogue, Music, Effects, 'n everything... They're going to be wild over me now that I've found my voice!

FORMERLY RELEASED
BY PARAMOUNT

26 KRAZY KAT

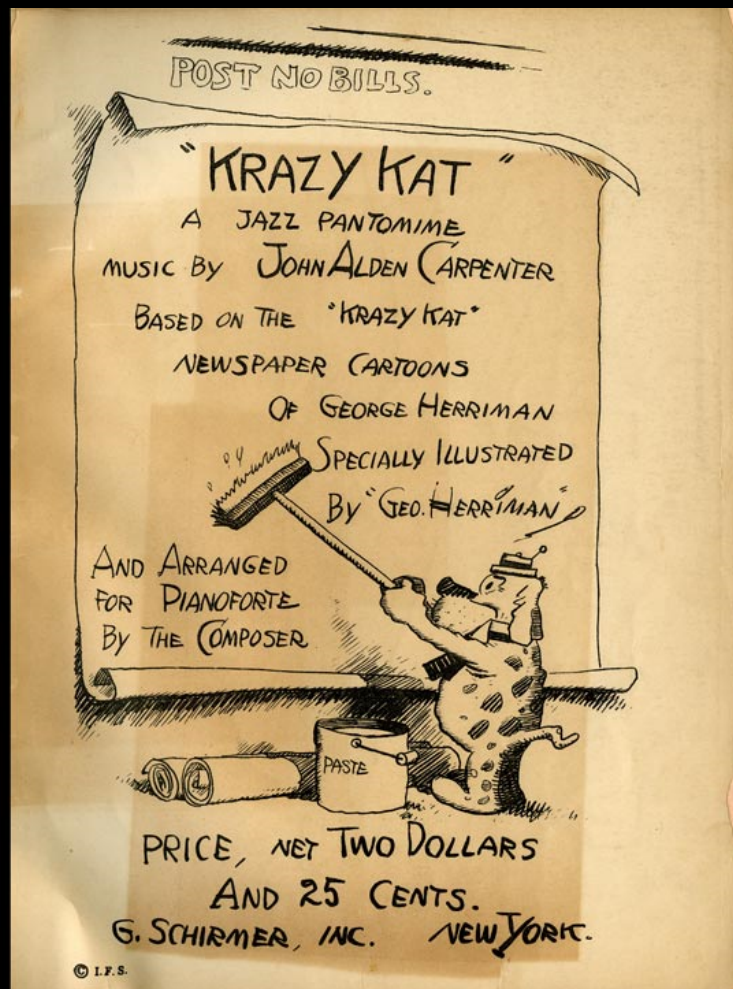
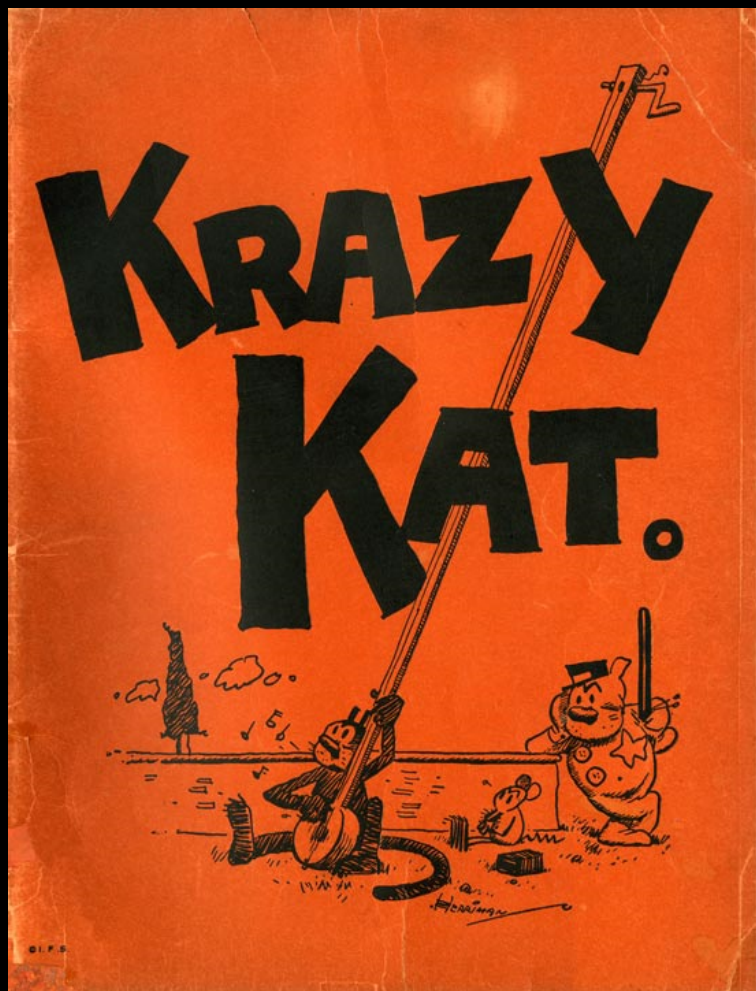
SNAPPY
DIALOGUE

CARTOONS

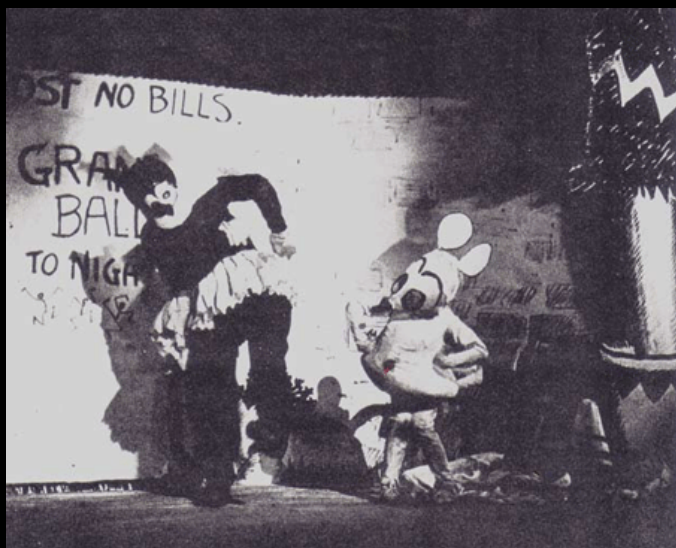
MUSIC and
EFFECTS

COLUMBIA offers 26 releases—one every other week—of this famous and deservedly popular cartoon feature... Krazy Kat in the "talkies" is more clever and more komical than ever... The public loves Krazy Kat—They'll eat him up in this Brand New Mirth-Provoking Series... A feature that invariably is the hilarious high spot on the program of the finest first-run theatres.

More faithful to the spirit of the original was a 1922 Ballet, with music by the American composer John Alden Carpenter. Herriman was fully and actively involved with this production. The piano score was handsomely published with Herrmann's own drawings, illustrating the storyline.



George Herriman, himself designed the costumes and created the scenery, which ingeniously replicated the ever changing backgrounds of the strip, by being painted on a long piece of canvas suspended on large rollers, permitting it to scroll across the stage, throughout the thirteen minute performance. Herriman actually painted this moving panorama, himself. Forty five years ago, my friend, Richard Merkin showed me a copy of the original program from the actual production. It was full of amazing photographs. I have tried in vain, many times, to find a copy of it on line, or on eBay. I did discover one small photo that is, most likely, from that program. It indicates the degree to which the bulky costumes dominate. "Swan Lake", this aint!



Last of all, I do have one fabulous Krazy Kat item, an original painting by George Herriman. He was known to do paintings, like this one, in colored ink, and give them as gifts to friends, already framed. He also used a unique style of frame. Orange and green was a favorite color scheme for these. That is why I posted this art extra-large, so I could include the frame. The painting was a gift to the actor Roland Young, who played Cosmo Topper in the movies, "Topper", "Topper Takes a Trip", and "Topper Returns". The situation the art depicts is typical Krazy Kat. Krazy, Ignatz and Offissa Pup, lean against some potted cactus plants in the surreal landscape of Cokoniino County, gazing at a brick that lies in the road before them. The dealer who sold me this, immediately regretted parting with it, and tried to buy it back again, within a week. I think he did some research on the price, which, incidently, wasn't cheap, and decided that he, nonetheless, made a mistake.



FELIX THE CAT

Life in Mouse heaven is like a game of Cat and Mouse. Not only is the place overrun with mice, it's littered with kitties too. Second only to Mickey in sheer quantity is Felix the Cat. Throughout my life as a collector, I adopted every stray black cat that crossed my path. And I never failed to feel excited each time there was a Felix sighted.

The story of Felix and his creator is a fascinating one. It has been chronicled beautifully by John Canemaker in his aptly named book, "The Twisted Tale of Felix the Cat." Suffice it to say that Felix's "owner" and "producer," Pat Sullivan, was like the giant head of the Mighty Oz, loudly taking credit for creating Felix, while a humble man behind the curtain, a young animator named, Otto Messmer, did everything! Messmer animated Felix, single handedly, in his first cartoon, "Feline Follies", in 1919. Otto went on to animate and direct some 150 more Felix cartoons. He also wrote and drew the Felix comic strip. Meanwhile, Pat Sullivan got all the credit, profits, and fame. He also got himself arrested and convicted of child molestation and rape. Right-E-O!

Felix was "Messmerizing" right from the start. His Jet Black body, contrasted against lighter backgrounds, grabbed the eye, and held it captive. Thus, Felix dominated and "stole" every scene! But, in the beginning, he was, also, more complex and difficult to draw. His shapes were angular and "Art Deco" like, in style. In 1924, pioneer animator Bill Nolan, worked with Otto Messmer to redesign Felix. Nolan is credited with developing what became known as the "Rubber Hose" style of animation. He changed Felix's somewhat foxlike pointed face and angular shapes to Circles. And, in so doing, injected Felix with the Secret "FORMula" that would "Shape" All Animation, from that time forward: CIRCLES! Circles, not only, made Felix easier to draw, but, also proved to be the "key", that made it possible for drawings to be passed from one animator to another, and worked on by a multitude of hands, without any, noticeable, change in style. Thus, the Circle became the Basic Shape, on which all Animation is Based. And, Felix the Cat, with his Circle eyes, and Circle nose, and Semi-Circle smile, upon his Circle head, Circle upon Circle, became the most Popular Comic Character, yet, to Frolic on the Silver Screen, or leap out, from it, into the World of Toys.



Although Pat Sullivan had nothing to do with the creation and continuing production of Felix, he was a master of merchandising. Thanks to his efforts to promote and license Felix internationally, products were produced all over the World! Felix was particularly popular in England where Felix products, and dolls, especially, were pumped out in profusion.

In that country a popular song was composed called "Felix Kept On Walking". Although, the sheet music for that ditty was rather unattractive, the image of Felix it pictured on the cover, walking with his hands behind his back, and looking pensive, became his most familiar pose, and the song title, itself, became a kind of catch phrase that adorned much of the Felix merchandise.

NO 1482.

6TH EDITION

ISSUED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE **"FELIX THE CAT"** CARTOONS
APPEARING EXCLUSIVELY IN Pathé's **"EVE & EVERYBODY'S"**
FILM REVIEW.

FELIX KEPT ON WALKING


WORDS BY
E. E. BRYANT

MUSIC BY
HUBERT W. DAVID

Copyright.

Price 6^d net

Lawrence Wright



In every Felix cartoon there came a moment, or many, when Felix, was faced with a dilemma. He would, then, pace back and forth, searching for a bright idea that would save the day. Often, at times like this, his tail would disconnect from his body and form a question mark, above his head. That surreal tail that had a life of its own, and could transform into anything, was a big part of Felix's charm. The essence of that "Kept On Walking" moment is captured in this Wiltshaw & Robinson Crested Carlton Ware China figurine. These were popular as souvenirs, throughout England, and they appeared with the emblem of nearly every town.



Many images and products depicted Felix in this position. Looking in the nearest showcase, just now, I realized that there are at least two dozen objects there that capture him in that pose, everything from radiator ornaments to plush toys. Just for the fun of it, I'll grab a few, and line them up.



The Felix walk was also captured in the classic Nifty tin toy, the last in line above. It was the first in a line of Felix tin toys to follow. It was also one of the last Nifty tin toys to be hand painted. The only tin lithography to appear on this toy is on a narrow band at Felix's waist that bears his name and copyright. Even the stuffed dolls adopted that hands behind his back walking pose, especially those that were made in England by Chad Valley and Deans Rag Book Company. They came in an endless variety of sizes, from tiny to humongous. A group of them have gathered around this showcase, window shopping.



Which of these would you choose to see under your Christmas tree? I won't attempt to identify them all. But, on the left, is a flat jointed Felix, made by the Performo Company, and one on the other end, as well. Conveniently resting on his feet, is the decorated ramp for the ramp-walking Felix. Further along the ramp, is a Spanish tin toy of Felix in a donkey cart. Just behind that, are two Felix Roly Polys, and to the left of these, is a mechanical walking Felix, very early, that has a heavy metal mechanism inside, and walks on all fours. Up towards the back, are three strange felt dolls, origin unknown, that may or may not be vampires, you decide! On the wall, is a Felix sparkler with red and green lenses in his eyes. There is a variation of the same, on the other side.



Here is a rare windup Felix doll. There is actually a windup clown inside, covered in a velvet Felix, with his original label hanging around his neck. According to his original box, far left, he is called the "Gee Dancer". The box shows other animals as well. On either side of him, are two of the first Felix dolls by Borgfeldt. These came in a variety of colors. There is a mechanism inside that allows their heads to be animated by moving their tails. Below the green one, is the medium sized wood jointed Schoenhut doll.



Moving to the very center, we see the brightly smiling face of a breathtaking Felix Nodder, with a bright red nose. His body is riding on a motorcycle. On either side of him, are an amazing pair of bookends. they represent a very sophisticated stylish take on the classic walking pose, and resemble ancient Egyptian icons. Can you picture these stately creatures, guarding a pharos tomb? And in the very center is the Classic Schoenhut Felix. The most iconic Felix item of all was this Schoenhut doll. It portrays Felix in his newly rounded out simplicity. And, judging from the fact that many still appear on eBay, every day, it must have been made in huge quantities. This really is an incredibly appealing image and I still experience a certain thrill, and sense of awe, at its power and perfection.



Trying to organize this flock of photos is like attempting to herd cats, I can't believe I misplaced, and almost eliminated the one below. Yes, I understand there is a certain redundancy, and yet, this photo has an enchantment to it. The bright orange of Felix's motorcycle almost resembles a roaring bonfire, casting its glow on a sea of Felix faces, all crowded around it, like a tribal meeting, a gathering of the clan, in Felix Land.



Several years ago, I had the pleasure of corresponding with Bill Shoenhut Sr. before he passed away. Bill was the 13th grandson of of Albert Schoenhut, the Schoenhut Company's founder. And he shared with me a treasure: these four photos of him as a boy, dressed in a costume, intended to represent the Schoenhut Felix Toy. Now, it is my pleasure to be able to share them with you, too.



In the center of this photo is a Felix that is rare to begin with, but rarer still in this pristine condition. As his label proclaims, this is the Schuco "Yes - No" Felix. A rather complex inner mechanism operated by moving his tail, enables him to nod his head to answer, "Yes", or turn, from side to side, to signify, "No!" Peeking over the front edge, below, is frenzied face of a wild windup.



Not much is known of Felix's private life. But it is rumored that he has a way with the Felines. When he calls "Kitty-Kitty Kitty," they come a-runnin'!

Below, Felix dons a hula skirt, not that there's anything wrong with that, and does an eye-popping hula dance for his bosom buddies, while a close relative, from the Town of York, walks in.

Oh, Dear!, it looks like that performance has created a Cat-astrophic Traffic Jam! Maybe we should get out of here, while we can!





Let's take one last look, then go downstairs to see what's happening down there.



One floor below, we encounter a Parade of prime Felix merchandise. It is traveling from the jungles of Felix, Volume One, over the rainbow, into the fairyland of Volume Two, while two Nifty Felix toys stand guard on either end. The parade is led by the two Felix scooters, German and American, and an ever so precious tiny wood jointed version that you'd never notice if I didn't point it out to you. Then comes the Felix Jigger, a unique item with an unique action, found only in this Felix toy, and the one behind it. Its box is on the right wall of the case above it. It was a gift from John Fawcett, so badly damaged he didn't want to deal with it; now it is lovingly repaired. This is followed by ...



The Felix Frolic, a toy so rare that this was the first and only one discovered for over 20 years. Since then, two more have appeared. They are in better condition. I don't care. I mentioned how I got this item in the section on Tin Comic toys, what I didn't say was that it was a wreck. I put many hours into its restoration over a period of months. It was the longest conversation I ever had with any toy, up to that time. Together, we decided how far to go. In the end, we were both exhausted, and agreed, enough already! I left the temporary nuts and screws in place and saw no need to replicate rivets. Much of my heart and soul, and creative energy is invested in this toy. I would never trade it for another. Not that anyone would make that offer.



This toy is big! How Big is it? Bigger than this picture, the biggest Comic tin toy, ever. And, no wonder, it is rare. It was practically designed to self-destruct. It needs to only tip over, once, and the figures become bent. This is the fully animated version, in which all five figures move. The central Felix performs the same action as the Felix Jigger, both arms and legs are animated. The other four figures rock back and forth. The mechanism is complex and delicate. The image is Strong and Powerful



Bringing up the rear, is the Steiff Felix on a go-cart. It is as “Mint” as mint can get. I thank my friend, Chet Moriyama for this. And last of all, is the barking Felix, a complex mechanism with effective animation, and a sound bellows, all made out of paper. There is a Bonzo version of this toy, as well.



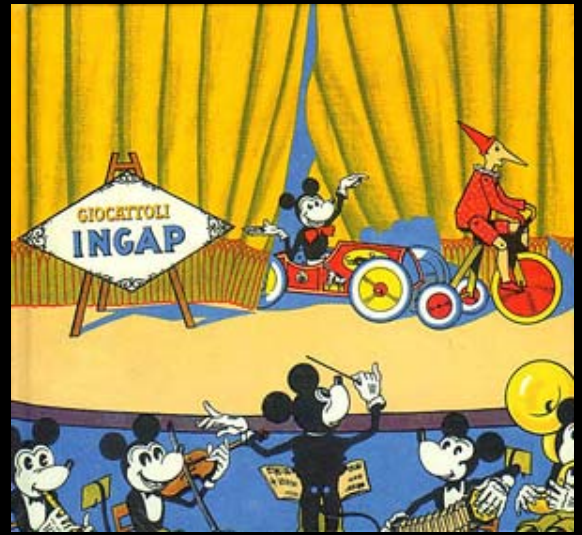
Now, we are out in the hall, and I am taking these photos, standing on a ladder. As my balance is shaky, even on solid ground, this isn't easy! Dangerous, but worth it, as I love those big cuddly fat Felix dolls. This whole showcase, so high up, and out of sight and reach, is so delicious. It is full of images that "kept on walking". On either end, are a pair of Felix bookends, similar to, but not as refined, as those ancient Egyptian looking ones in the big showcase . Then, in the back are two different walking push toys.



There are three items, here, that replicate the anger displayed on the music cover, a stunning wooden jigsaw puzzle that was adapted directly from the cover art, a ceramic piece, with angry teeth, meticulously painted on, and a German bisque figurine that is unique. It stands atop a smiling wood cigarette dispenser. That anger was later tempered to become a more pensive worried look, more characteristic of the cat, as known in the cartoons. Here, too, is a Steiff hand puppet, and a plaster statue of Felix, licking his lips.



Also licking his lips, is this strangely unappealing Felix on an English toffee tin. And, on top of that, is the Italian version of the Felix scooter, manufactured by "Ingap", with "Felix" in Italian, which is "Miao Miao," written on his chest. But the most curious object in this case is the companion toy, which, believe it or not, is intended to be Mickey Mouse, or Topolino, as he is called in Italy. The 1932 Ingap catalogue (which I have around here, but can't find) the year this toy was introduced features it on the cover. It pictures the stage of a theater with a Mickey orchestra, Disney version, and emerging from the parted curtains, is this car, driven by Disney's Mickey. But the toy shown inside, and called, Topolino, was this one, as you see it here. Here is a small picture of that cover that I just found, on line.



Yes, I know, the photo, below, adds nothing new, but I'm including it, anyway. I just love the look of it, the warmth, the lighting; it is a pleasant photograph.



Now up the spiral staircase, we find another fairly major Felix showcase. This one, too, houses a cornucopia of Felix treasures. In the very center, is a highly stylized bisque pincushion. Gathered around it, are several of the early dolls, including a Cowboy Felix, perfect and complete. There are lots of fuzzy English dolls, as well, with their scary little teeth. Right out in front, is an Austrian bronze sextet, which, may or may not, be half a set of what could be an orchestra. Behind them, is one of the more elaborate items, produced for Felix Chevrolet, a painted hood ornament.



The photo above is taken looking down. That's the way I see this showcase, every day. Now, better and safer than standing on a ladder, is lying on the floor. I love these low angled shots. Until you see close ups, like these, you're not seeing what I see. From this angle, these objects can be as monumental as anything in Washington DC. This is a good time to close one eye. and experience these sights in "2 ½ D"



My favorite object, in this showcase, is this strangely stylized wooden puppet. From his triangular ears to his round tummy, everything about him is refreshing and unique. By the way, he is hovering above a clever optical toy, "The Gramophone Cinema," a variation of the Zoetrope. It sits atop a phonograph, and a slotted cone, not shown, rests on the three wheeled device, and rotates in the opposite direction. Viewed through the spinning slots, Felix keeps on walking.



There is one more Felix case, apart from stragglers, all over the place. Here are collected odds and ends that include many great things. Right out in front, in this shot only, are three Felix ice fishing decoys. Their age and origins are undecided. Clearly they are the work of one carver, and beautifully done. No two are the same.



I won't attempt to identify everything in this case, but just point out some highlights that may not be self-evident. In the back, is a 1926 Performo MICKY. This one shows more clearly how different he really is from Disney's Mickey. Just below him, is a celluloid Felix that bears, by accident or fate, a striking resemblance to a Maurice Sendak's Wild Things. In the center, is another of the first dolls. This one is plum colored, with an animated head. And on the right, is a rather naturalistic radiator ornament.



Here, in the center back, is a spectacular vase that depicts Felix and Bonzo, either dancing, or embracing. Bonzo is swallowing a small Schoenhut Felix. In the front, with a balloon, is the standard Performo Micky. And a flat tin Felix on a zeppelin from the Felix Carousel. Therein lies a tale, too long, to be told now. Moving along, we come to another radiator ornament, and a colorful tin lithographed pail and lid.



Featured in this case, is a marvelous plaster Felix with rhinestone eyes. And next to that, a curious and highly stylized wood Felix shaped box from Japan. Here, too, is another Schoenhut doll, and a bottle of Felix Ginger Ale. All are standing, by the way, on a floor made up of Felix bottle caps.



Outside the box, is a large wood jointed Felix, from Germany or Italy, and a fabulous set of Felix ten pins. To the left of them, is a curious wood walking toy, and on the right another ice fishing decoy. This in the form of a fish! On either side of all of this, is a pair of Mickey and Minnie “folk art” door stops. And we can just about stop here!



Over thirty years ago, a friend in California mentioned that he knew some folks at Felix Chevrolet. They have used Felix, officially, as their name and identity, since the early days. I was aware that, over the years, their showrooms have been decorated with large statues of Felix, made of papier mache. My friend suggested that I give them a call. So, not knowing what to expect, I did. It turned out that the guy I spoke to was great. Yes, they did have these figures, but they had long ago been replaced with exact replicas, made from the original molds for the papier mache figure, using fiberglass, instead. And, it just happened that they were in the process of sending the existing ones in to be refurbished, and they were also ordering more. I asked if I could possibly have one made for me. Absolutely! The more they ordered, the lower the price would be! WOW! In that case, I'll take three! Here is my daughter Alexandra, then ten, hamming it up, on the day that they arrived. I passed one on to Colorforms, and it adorned their lobby for many years. Then the owner, Harry Kislevitz had it shipped out to him, in LA. I traded the other to Noel Barrett for the Bumstead family marionettes. And the last one is still here with me.





Compiling this webpage has been something of a revelation. I guess, I did just keep adopting these stray cats, all my so-called adult life. I never stopped to assess them, as I have done Mickey, many times. I just kept making room for more. Now this page is so long that the computer is rebelling, and acting funny when I scroll. Although, I am aware of every nuance, as far as their individual aesthetics go, I never attempted to decide which image, which era, was the most perfect realization of the character.

I have a young friend, Jaymie, who visited here a couple of times last year with his family. I think he figured it out for me. Instantly, intuitively, he was drawn to one image, one object, in the entire house. I would say he was, and is, enchanted by it. And he is right, of course, this is the perfect Felix. It is based on the classic image, the Schoenhut doll. And the idol that embodies the power of that image, most effectively, is this large imposing toy/sculpture, created by an artist who left this World too early, the late great William Shelly.

Bill crafted this perfect replica of the classic Schoenhut Felix, entirely out of wood. He turned all the pieces on a giant lathe. And the face is carved into the surface of the basic ball shape, exactly as the original was made. The illusion is that the facial details were added on, but, actually, they are the outer surface of the ball. The head, itself, is carved in, with such skill that the rounded curves remain as flawless as if they were created by machine.

The process of doing this in wood was both a challenge and a joy to him. Every detail, every nuance, is perfection. This impressive sculpture is over three feet tall, and is fully jointed. It is strung with strong elastic cord, like the original 9" doll. It weighs a ton, and, clearly, radiates the fact that it was a labor of love. What is the perfect image of Felix the Cat? Jaymie and Bill Shelly, too, knew which one to choose.



OSWALD The Lucky Rabbit

In 1926, after a series of “Alice Comedies”, Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks, together, created “Oswald The Lucky Rabbit.” Oswald became instantly popular, competing against the other cartoon movie stars in town, Felix the Cat, and KoKo the Clown.

Compared to Felix, who generated a ton of stuff, there was, apparently, very little Oswald merchandise made. And much of that is clad in mystery. What among the items known were actually created when Oswald was still “owned” by Walt Disney? Well, Disney didn’t actually own him. That was the problem. Anyway, when Disney lost Oswald, in 1928, he went on to create Mickey.... and the rest is History!

All the Oswald stuff I’ve ever seen, with the exception of a large skinny doll by Dean, is shown below. The single most extraordinary and graphically satisfying Oswald object is, by all means, this doll. I got this from the ultimate doll maven, Richard Wright, who had owned it all his life. That is all the provenance a doll needs. Its actual origin is a mystery, but it is clearly early. And, is it “manufactured”? Absolutely! As an ICON this is as good as Oswald gets! So putting my best rabbit’s foot forward here he is:



There are three Oswald items, generally acknowledged to have been manufactured in Disney's Oswald days. One is a candy bar wrapper, which is Oswald, in name only, as the art pictures a white bunny, a pin back button, Zzzzzz, and one other thing, a very decent Stencil Set. The first two items never interested me. The stencil set, on the other hand, is a different matter. It is a graphic bonanza, of delicious Oswald Imagery.

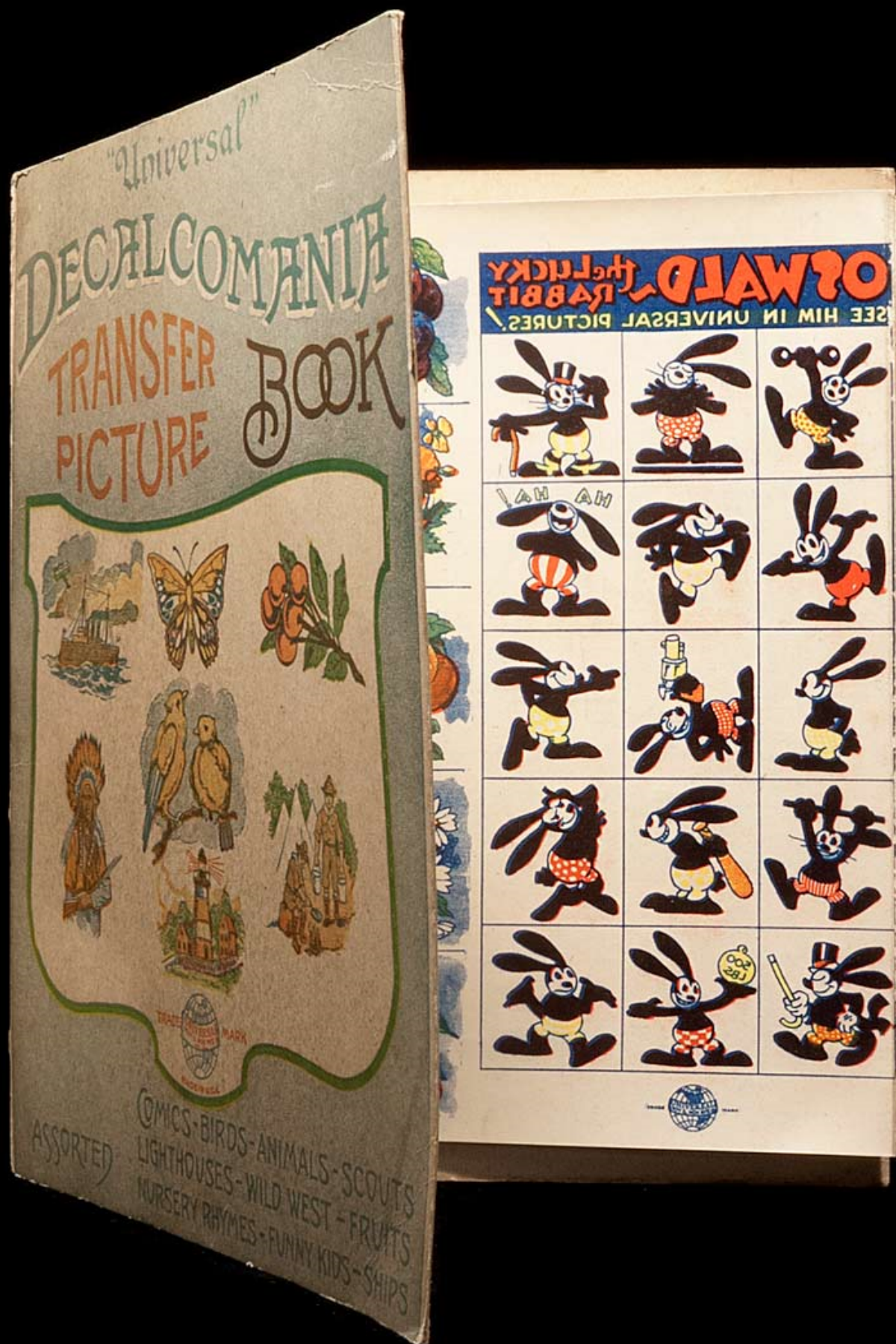
Panning out from there, we see the rest. Many of these objects are labeled "Universal Pictures". That gives them some legitimacy as being closely related to Disney's Oswald, but, whether or not, they were made during Disney's stewardship, or immediately after, is impossible to say. In the very back of the case, on either side, are two large stuffed Oswalds. They are hidden, largely due to lack of space. One of these is how I first met my friend Carl Lobel. I purchased it from him by mail, very early on. These are not of the same quality as the doll in the middle. On either side of that doll, are two large and impressive windup toys. They were manufactured by "Irwin Toys".



I'll never forget when the first of these turned up; Nirvana! I had to have it! Several more have appeared over the years, until they seem almost commonplace. To reach a state of "commonplace" in the rarified world of Comic Character collecting, all it takes is three! One is "rare", two is "scarce", and three is commonplace. There may be as many as ten of these. Far more hard to get is the smaller version, on the left, with checkered pants. He also is a windup toy.

On the opposite side, is a printed oilcloth Oswald doll, the only one I've ever seen. And in the middle, are three dolls made in England by Dean. The one in the center is made of wood. Dean's rag Book Company, later, repeated this format with Mickey dolls, as well. And, of course, here is the Stencil Set. The bright pink stencils have faded over the years, but I have a replacement set that's never seen the light of day. From the ceiling hang several celluloid Oswald toys. They also bear the "Universal" label.

Here is a strange oddity. Oswald appears, without any fanfare, in this generally generic Decalcomania Transfer Picture Book, of the era. God knows what he's doing there. The Company that made the decals is also named Universal, the same as the movie company that produced the Oswald cartoons. I wonder if they are connected?



Moving along the top row of showcases, on the wall, downstairs ... this is as good a time as any to showcase another case that contains four dolls. The one on the far left is Oswald, as he was transformed, in later years, in the hands of Walter Lantz. This is a surprisingly appealing doll. It probably dates from the 1940s. His rotund chubbiness, pressed velvet face, and floppy ears create a look and feel that's loveable, but he bears no resemblance to the original Oswald.

The Bimbo doll, on the far right, is right out of prime time. He dates from around 1930, and as a doll, according to the ads in Playthings magazine, actually, predated Betty. The Pluto is by Gund. He was the standard Pluto that I knew as a kid. There was always a whole litter of these pups, littering the shelves of the J.L. Hudson Company.



And, last of all, is this chubby Mickey, made by the Character Novelty Company. When I first began collecting Mickey, he was the sole exception to my "pie-cut eyes only" rule, the only 1940s Mickey I had. In fact, he still remains the only Mouse, this late, in my collection. There was just something about this cuddly Mickey that appealed to me, and made him welcome, in spite of his 1940s eyeballs and chubby cheeks.

Unfortunately, I will always associate him with the time, in 1968, when I met Disney's, then, new archivist, David Smith. A photo of my meager collection of Mickey Mice had just appeared in Life Magazine, and David Smith, who happened to be visiting NYC, invited himself over to see it, in person. At that time, it consisted of that wall on 28th street. Modest as that might have been, nonetheless, it had caused many a grocery delivery boy, upon entering the apartment, to drop the groceries in surprise.

I was as unimpressed with David's tact and savoir faire, as he was with my collection. His first words to me, as he stepped through the front door, were, "Is this all there is?" Well, what did I expect? After all he was coming from the Disney archives; I could hardly think he'd be impressed. But, it was the second thing he said that quite blew me away. Walking over to the chubby 1940 mickey, above, and picking it up, he exclaimed, "OH, This is the first Mickey doll, isn't it!" He wasn't asking, he was announcing that information, which, of course, was "news" to me!

Ironically, years later, a good friend's friend, who happened to be the Dean of the school that Michael Eisner attended as a kid, wrote Eisner that he really should see, and consider acquiring my collection. Eisner passed the letter on to David Smith. And David's reply to Eisner, which I later read, simply said, "There's too much there!"

BLACK AND WHITE

Welcome to the Wonderful World of “Black and White.” These are two words I find exciting, when applied to Mickey, as they usually mean that the mouse is going to be both great and early! One of the things that always fascinated me about the Victorian Toy Theatre, was the fact that on the opening night of every new production to appear on the London stage, for half a century, the front row of the theatre was always occupied by artists, madly sketching every actor and scene, rushing to be the first to publish the play in miniature as toy theatre sheets. And so it was with early Mickey. In the very beginning, all around the World, artists were sitting in darkened theatres attempting to capture the likeness of this new character, Mickey Mouse, and then render him in toys and figurines. And because what they saw was in black and white, so were the things they made.

And, furthermore, being black and white proclaimed that this animated entity, like Felix the cat, before him, was a Movie Star. For all movies, up to that time, had always been in black and white. This phenomenon, most often, took place in Europe, where licensing was just beginning, and many a manufacturer felt that this popular new character was theirs for the taking. They were certainly not getting a licensing package from Disney; all they had for reference material was what they could capture in a darkened theatre. That, too, is the reason that much of this very early merchandise presents Mickey with five fingers. The fact that he had only four escaped their observation. Thus, five fingered Mickey, again says “early”, and often, but not always, unlicensed. And the worse the artist’s powers of observation were, the wilder and more interesting were the variations.

Thus, I regard “Black and White as a “Category”, and always an exciting one! The exquisite china figurines by Rosenthal were always Black and White, so were the many jointed wooden dolls made in Germany and Italy, and offbeat images of every kind. A single black and white Mickey in a group of brightly colored ones, never fails to catch the eye. And when these objects of no color are grouped together, their impact is intensified.



Just as Black and white objects stand out in a showcase full of colored things, so, too, do Colored objects “pop”, when set among objects that are all Black and White. In the very center, above, is the Desmo painted version of the Mickey Mouse auto mascot, or hood ornament. And on the other pedestal is a smaller Minnie. The background is the screen from an English Mickey Mouse slide projector. On either side of Mickey, are a pair of German soap figures. Their noses are glass tipped hatpins. Incredibly, when the soap dissolves, to a certain point, the bather gets the point! They sure don’t make soap like that, anymore! To the left, is the French radiator ornament. It has a very different look than those made in England.



Behind Minnie is a Cast Iron Doorstop, holding a badge from the Dutchess Junction Fire Company. In front, is a sculpture by Ernie Trova. To the left of Minnie, is a wooden Mickey doll, made in Germany. On the right, is a Spectacular Crystal Canister, surrounded by a small Mickey porcelain orchestra. The rarest piece, among them, is Mickey crawling on top of the grand piano. And in front, is a wooden German orchestra. Behind is Mickey carved out of a piece of coal, and in the corner is the mascot from my father-in-law’s lorry, circa 1934. And then there is a gossamer spun paper Mickey, carrying an umbrella. In the Center is a German condiment set with a Mickey Mouse mustard pot and Mickey salt and pepper shakers. In the very front is a tiny blown glass orchestra. These delicate figures were made by hand. On either side of the Mickey mustard, are a pristine pair of Mickey and Minnie party favors made of crepe paper. How does something this peripheral and delicate survive for 80 years?

Hiding behind the canister, is this delicate blown glass aperitif bottle. It has never been opened. The sealed nose stopper is still in place. In spite of that, the contents have evaporated.



And here is a tiny dish by Rosenthal, on which Mickey strikes a carefree pose. A small composition Felix has got his eye on Mickey. He thinks he's the cats whiskers.



The showcase, below, is overrun with Rosenthals. These are among the finest quality Mickeys known. And they are very early. The model sheets that they were based on were the very first ones. Ironically, the pencil drawing for that first Mickey model sheet is on the wall above the showcase, and there is one pose on it, in particular, that never appeared in any product, except one of the Rosenthals, which happens to be in the showcase below. All the Classic Rosenthal poses are here, except one, Minnie powdering her nose. Only that one has eluded me. Mostly because, whenever it turned up, it was simply too expensive. There are several other porcelain pieces, here, that are also black and white, but not by Rosenthal.



The case is dominated by an exceedingly rare toy. Well, actually, it's not a toy at all! It is a still figure, a statue made of tin. That, apart from the fact that it is the only one known, renders it doubly unique. When I first saw it, I thought it was its twin, the rare, but, nevertheless, known windup with an animated face, simply, with the face uncut. But that is not the case. The lithography, here, is completely different, and was not made to be cut up. This figure has no moving parts at all. It seems rather ironic that the rarest tin windup toy I own, winds up not being a windup toy at all.



My God! I love this photo! It captures the essence of entering the Temple of Mickey Mouse. It illustrates the principle of appreciation and admiration, that is the way I choose to see these icons, and the way they should be viewed, in my opinion. One must practice the willing suspension of size awareness. What a difference the camera angle makes. The photo above this one, shot, looking down on the same showcase, displays a crowd of small objects crammed into a single space. But seen from this lower angle, confronting these objects on their own level, they become monumental! It's all so simple, and it is the key to seeing the objects in this collection through my eyes. It is the difference between looking down on something or looking up to it.



Behold the awesomeness of Mickey! Whew, just looking at these pictures, now, I realize, there's just too much crammed into them to describe. But I'll mention a few things. A windup tumbling Mickey by Schuco sits on the couch. Fanned out behind it is a Mickey fan with a mouse carved out of every blade, and a couple dozen Mickey razor blades, beautifully packaged, are sprinkled throughout the case. That is a line of them balanced atop the frame.



There are some Amazing framed photographs in this case. The one below is that of an entire group of children, all clad in Mickey costumes, and posed as in a dream, a pleasant hallucination. Behind the tin Mickey in the middle is an official photo of the 1931 Fanchon and Marco show "Mickey Mouse Idea."



There is a small but beautiful German marionette, and a Spanish tin plunger toy, in which Mickey lifts the lid of a container to reveal Felix el Gato. And on the Mickey pedestal, stands the Distler walking Mickey. Both the Dixon pencil boxes are represented here. One is made of paper, and the other is made of composition.



And on the right, is an amazing photograph of an enormous audience of children all wearing Mickey and Minnie paper masks. This photo was blown up to the size of a wall for the 1973 Bamberger show. Here also is another smaller variation of the Desmo radiator ornament.



A small German bisque Bonzo is listening to a Crosley Radio, while Baby Snookums is not amused. Several of the Rosenthals were sports related, depicting events at the Olympics. This one is the shot put, another is the discus throw, and my favorite features a soccer ball, perched on the tip of Mickey's toe.



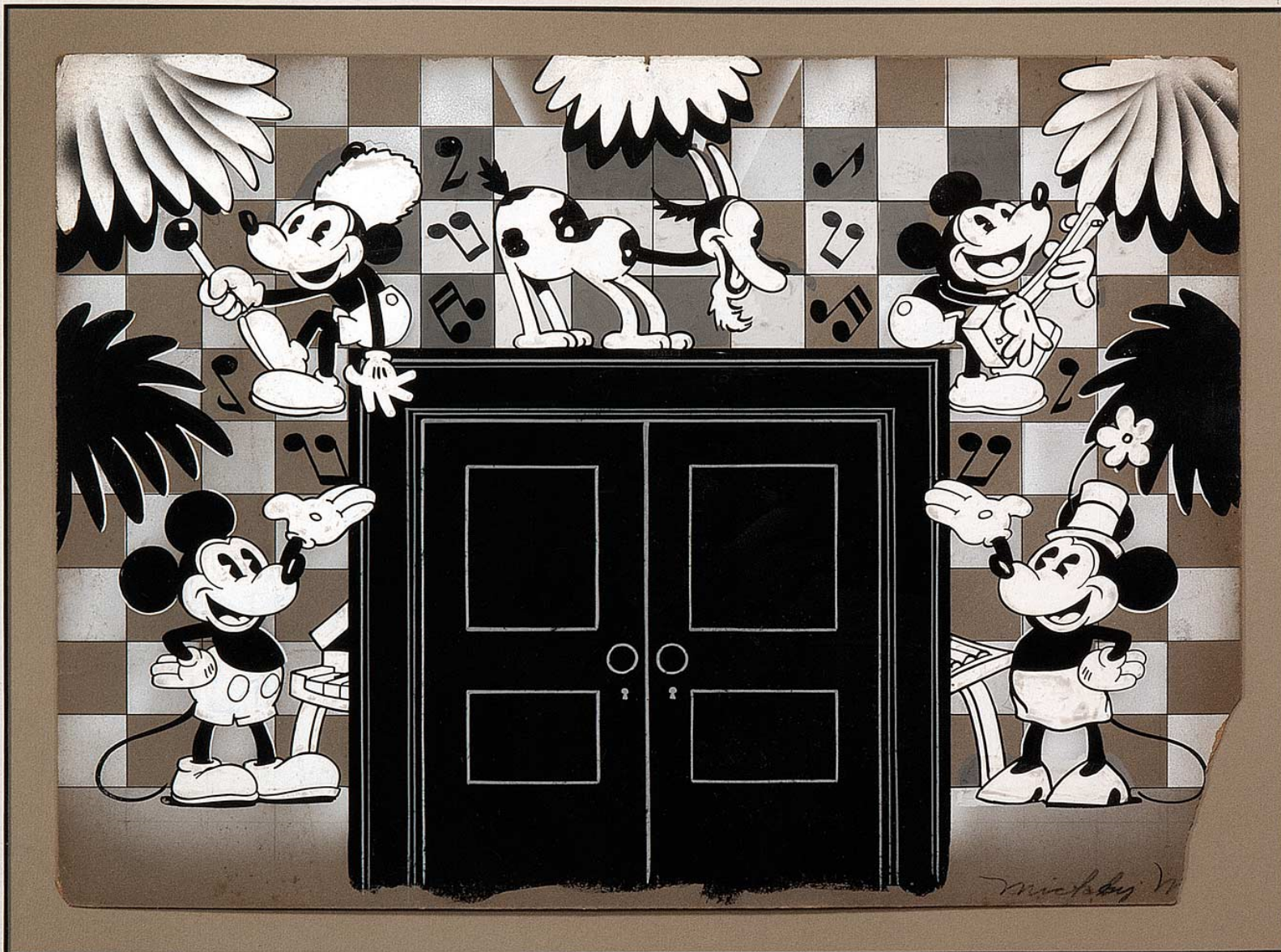


Here is a Distler Walking Mickey. It's condition is the best of any I have seen. This toy is quite severe, somewhat robotic, and abstract. The totally round eyes are a surprise. Here, as well, is a pair of German dancers. Their feet are huge. Their grins are sinister. Minnie's dress is crepe paper.

From the angle, below, we can see the first Mickey fan card on the wall. This is what a child would get when he or she wrote a fan letter to Mickey. I notice a most curious phenomenon: the small celluloid mirror has picked up a glowing image of the Mickey Mouse lamp on the opposite wall.



The art below is a mystery. It's origins and place in Mickey's history are unknown. But, as it is so black and white, I will include it here. It is an original design for the entrance doors to the auditorium of a movie theatre. It is clearly very early. The artist adopted some of the imagery from the first known depictions of Mickey and Minnie. He also created some of his own. Those that he copied, verbatim, have four fingers. The ones that he made up, have five. This piece of art is extremely sophisticated and well designed. It displays a sense of symmetry; note the matching angles of the ukulele and the baton, played off against asymmetrical elements, such as the Steamboat Willy goat and the flower in Minnie's hat. All this is placed against a checkered background that is bold. There were other designs in the series, but this was the only one that related to Mickey.



Now, we go upstairs to where the World of Black and White, or I might better say, White on White, continues. This showcase contains many uncolored things made of plaster. But the wooden object in the center is, by far, the most extraordinary, a wood jointed Mickey Mouse from Spain, with a clock in his belly. He is the ultimate Mickey Mouse timepiece! A pair of modern Mickey and Minnie figures that are borderline OK, have also danced their way into this case.



To the left of Mickey is a pot metal statue of Abe Kabibble, or “Abie the Agent”, the first Jewish comic character, circa 1914. Jackie Coogan as “The Kid” comes next, and then, a delightful sculpture of Grace Drayton’s parody of the painting, September Morn by Paul Chabas. Grace Drayton created the Campbell's Kids. Perhaps you notice the resemblance to them.



"September Morn" is followed by one of many known plaster images of Charlie Chaplin. Moving forward, there is a plaster "Spark Plug" sniffing a sleeping Bonzo. Farther right, are two interesting early and obscure characters, "Joy" and "Gloom" by T. E. Powers. They appeared in books and comic strips and even some early silent animated films, but are quite unknown today. These few things, here, are all I have found related to them, over the years. In front of these are a rare set of unpainted figurines from some sort of ceramic painting set by Harman and Ising. Their best known character was Bosco, the first reoccurring character to appear in Looney Tunes cartoons.



This end of the showcase contains some interesting odds and ends. Did you ever think you'd see a china figure of Felix the Cat, using the kitty litter? Behind him is a rather handsome statue of Buster Brown and Tige. Next to that is a bronze image of Felix the Cat, so primitive that it resembles a "Wild Thing" by Maurice Sendak. And here is that great Bonzo, again. We spoke about him, early on. Here, too, is a rather animated statue of Jiggs. And in the very back, is the Our Gang figure painting set, consisting of several early unpainted bisques, mostly hidden, and a cardboard stage, or Club House. You might also spot a celluloid head that resembles an Aesop's Movie Fables elephant. I'm still looking for the body. And two early skeletons, one of which is the business end of an Ives toy



And the last of the Black and White objects, included here, (You'll notice more, elsewhere) is this set of porcelain Mickey Mouse musicians. They were made in Germany as well, but not by Rosenthal. These images were available in several sizes and variations. This set is made up of the largest figures. It features a Mickey Mouse conductor with articulated legs and arms. Notice how articulately he holds that fragile porcelain baton. You might also notice that the hand holding it has five fingers. Some, but not all, of the others have four.



Now that you've seen this, It might be logical to continue to the Pyramid of Bisques.

THE BISQUE PYRAMID



This Pyramid of Bisques illustrates one of the conundrums of collecting: In the Beginning ... You see one incredible object and say, Oh! If I purchase that wonderful thing, and take it home with me, it will look wonderful, and I will be happy! And you do. You set it in a special place, and it glows! And you are happy. Then, one day, you see another wonderful thing, and you say to yourself, If I acquire this as well, I'll place it beside to my other special thing, and together they will look twice as great. So you get that too. But when you set it down next to your other incredible thing, there is a surprise in store for you. I might better say, a disappointment, for try as you may to convince yourself otherwise, you realize, somewhere deep inside, that rather than the two, together, shining twice as bright, each one is glowing half as brightly as the first one did, alone. That doesn't alter the fact that you still want them both!

Welcome to Collecting! That's what it's all about. And that's, essentially, the situation I find myself in, now, surrounded by a thousand objects, each glowing one thousandth as brightly as that first object did, in the beginning, half a century ago.

ON the other hand, I believe that when this multitude of dimly glowing objects are combined, they radiate a glorious light, as cheerful as the luminescence that emanates from store windows at Christmas time, or the enchanted twinkling of a thousand fireflies on a summer night. As a totality these objects glow with the magic of a Christmas tree alight, amid a million sparkling flakes of falling snow. Therefore, when you've got too many treasures, and you love collecting too much to stop, there is no place left to go, but up. Keep adding items to the top. And if you believe that the totality of a collection can be greater than the sum of all its parts, chances are that, one day, the collection, itself, will be regarded as a Work of Art.

In the beginning ... around 1968, the beginning of Mickey Mouse collecting, and the beginning of Flea Markets in the USA, Disney bisques would turn up frequently. Collecting Mickey Mouse bisque figurines was fun, and relatively inexpensive. And, like all the stuff that surfaced, then, each was an exciting "new " discovery. As the number of collectors grew, the list of newly discovered bisques grew too. Collectors were slowly assembling a picture puzzle, one piece at a time, until, eventually, almost all the variations that are known today were found, and the picture was complete.



My friend Bernie Shine, out in LA was into compiling lists of bisques. He recorded all their serial numbers, (usually found incised in the clay) and, like a detective, tracing any missing numbers, he mapped the terrain of the bisques domain. In my case, discovering them remained a lot of fun, but owning them became a pain, more ridiculous than gratifying. I had passed the point where displaying them, all lined up on shelves, appeared attractive, and a new word entered my bisque related vocabulary: "repetitive." Except for the biggest most spectacular ones, most of mine ended up, crowded together, at least , temporarily, on the floor of one big flat showcase, and the effect was that of a crowd of comic characters packed into Times Square on New Year's Eve. Only the the tops of their heads, and the figures placed along the edge of the case would show. Needless to say, they ceased to glow.

Therefore, when the Great Wall was constructed, I asked my friend and carpenter, Bill Maxwell to build a Pyramid, on which each could be seen again. And all these individual treasures, which, while discovering and collecting them, appeared to be newsworthy, became just so many square feet of hand painted unglazed clay. Like the individual offset dots on a printed page that grouped together make up a bigger picture, they became the building stones in a single curious object, a Pyramid of Bisques.

On the very pinnacle I placed this glorious 9" Mickey that was an early landmark on my collecting journey. I found him for the, then, outrageously high sum of \$20, a few minutes after my friend Richard Merkin and I snuck into the Madison square Garden Show, in 1967. In the years, since then, mint examples of him have appeared; I let them pass me by. Barring an earthquake, this Mickey will always be top mouse on the pyramid for me.



These days, with a big new Mickey Mouse doll showcase in place, I can no longer simply stand in front of the pyramid and take a photograph, head on. The one above was taken with the camera actually resting on the top of the Big Mickey case, itself, and looking down. That is my least favorite camera angle if one prefers to see their subject matter as monumental. To experience the Pyramid from ground level it had to be shot at an angle. Here is that view from either side:



Can one stand before the great pyramids of Egypt and single out a single stone as particularly interesting? I don't think so. But, in spite of that analogy, there remain several special areas on this pyramid that continue to excite my eye, and a few pieces that, after all these years, retain a certain rarity. At this point in time, I don't think there is a single one that is absolutely one of a kind. But there are many that still seem special to me, areas and groupings that I find, especially, pleasing.



I always loved this little group of three, Horace Horsecollar, Betty Boop, and Clarabelle Cow. They represent a trio of perfect harmony. My art-trained eye informs me that they are, most likely, all three, the work of one sculptor, circa 1933. Betty and Clarabelle strike the identical pose. The fact that Horace and Clarabelle form a set is obvious, but they gently cross the species line to include Betty Boop. Who was it, I wonder, that sculpted all these images? There is a certain similarity the unifies the figurines on this pyramid. Could all, or most of them, have been the work of a single unknown artist in Japan?



Here is a Betty Boop and KoKo the Clown toothbrush holder that is something of a rarity. I have heard of, possibly, one more of these. At Betty and KoKo's feet you can catch a glimpse of some bits of colored cellophane. Would you believe that, at one time, bisque figurines, like these, were used as a means of selling candy? I, myself, can remember them, dispensed in vending machines, with small cellophane wrapped bundles of candy strapped to their backs. Two of the three pigs, below, still have their original candy intact. in this photo, you can just see their hats.



It was great fun collecting bisques, but like the Comic Nodders, they became a dead-end street. I reached a point where my entire set of known variations was as complete as it is ever going to get. There are a few other Disney bisques that are interesting and rare, but, with no space left on the pyramid, I have had to place them elsewhere. They are in what I refer to as the Tall Tower. I'll point them out when we get there.

While shooting these photographs, a curious thought occurred to me. Like the Great Pyramid of Giza, or the Temple of the Sun at Machu Picchu, both of which tourists have been known to climb, what would it be like to climb the Pyramid of Bisques? Standing at the foot of it, and looking up, it might appear like this.



And so, that's it! After half a century of collecting these, they don't amount to a hill of beans. They form a Pyramid, instead.

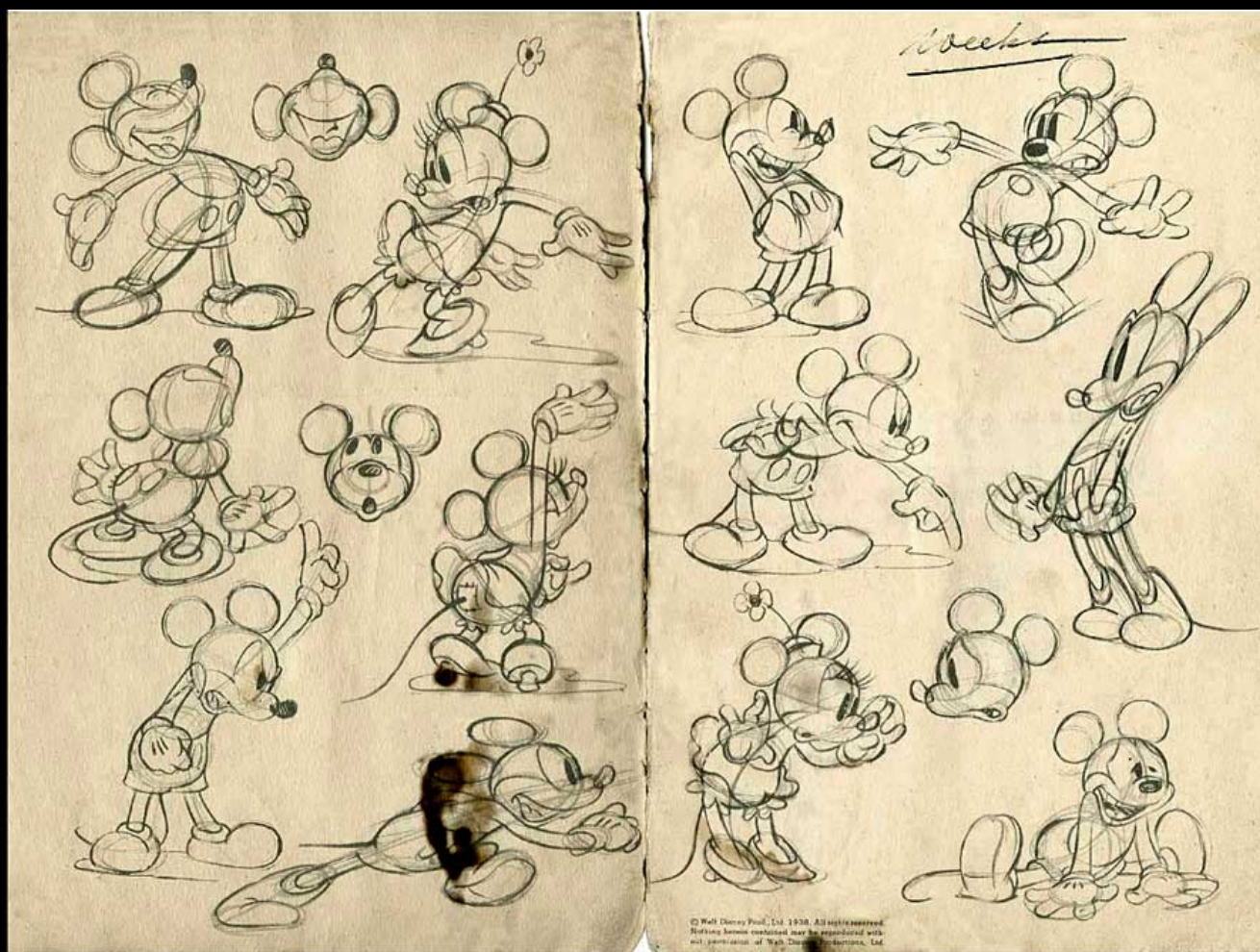


GEOMETRIC CELLULOID

I have no idea what these toys are called. Japanese Celluloid, I suppose, because its celluloid, and made in Japan, mostly before the Second World War. I always referred to this exercise in pure geometry and simple form, often carried to extremes, as "Geometric Celluloid". It was one of the few things I collected that I managed to succeed in keeping secret. One could find these exquisite objects at flea markets and shows, and nobody seemed to be particularly interested in them. Nobody, that is, but me! Whenever I acquired one of these remarkable toys, I instantly hid it away from emulating eyes. Therefore, they remained affordable for a long time.

Why was I drawn to these? The explanation is as simple as a geometric toy. When I was a kid, as soon as I was old enough to hold a pencil, drawing comic characters became "my thing". By second grade, I had all the Disney characters memorized. And standing at the blackboard on entertainment days, I could draw any character my class could name. I also had a marvelous book called, "Junior's Fun to Draw". It illustrated, step by step, the secret way that Mickey and his friends were made: Circles! They were all made up of circles and simple geometric shapes.

Early Mickey is the most perfect example of an image made up of pure geometry. That is why he is so universal. Mickey is, essentially, just a bunch of circles. If one were to take him apart, or dissect his body anyplace, they would discover a circular shape.



In the early days of animation, circles were the key to everything. They were the way that characters were formed and visualized. That is why they had a three dimensionality that enabled them to turn and move in two dimensional illusionary space. Circles were the factor that permitted several different artists to all draw the same character with consistent uniformity. They were also the means by which size and proportions were determined, and kept the same. Each character was designed to be so many circles high. This underlying geometry was the key to how the best and most powerful Comic Characters were made.

And, so, it was that I grew up, believing that if one could just detect the secret circles, they could draw anything! I continued to hold this belief, throughout my years at art school, where I continued to look for circles, especially in Life Drawing Class, where there were plenty to be seen, if you know what I mean. Yes, seeing secret circles, and revealing them to others was what I found most challenging and exciting about drawing the human figure.



Disney disliked the obvious geometry of his early creations. He saw their easily detectable structure as a weakness, and sought to make his characters more complicated, and hide their circles, in a never ending quest to achieve “reality”. This was a self-defeating goal, for as animation became increasingly real, one questioned its very necessity. Not surprisingly, I just read yesterday that the Disney organization has done away with hand drawn animation, altogether. They just shut the department down, and laid off all the animators. And thus, a Glorious Era comes to an end!

Geometric Celluloid is all about where it began. Here is the pure geometry that underlies the most dynamic imagery, at its most pure and powerful, stripped bare of all pretense. Add to that a dazzling array of brilliant color and wild imagination, set free, and you are in the amazing World of Celluloid Geometry.



Once I had cleared all the stuff in front of this showcase away, and shot a long shot of the entire case, I realized that there was something lacking. The total showcase was simply too complex, with no sense of scale to assess its awesomeness. So, I sat down on the floor before it, to take some close ups, with the protective Plexiglas removed. And before I knew it, I was drawn up into the showcase, living momentarily in a Geometric Celluloid World. Come join me in that place where the wildest colors bloom, and simple geometric shapes combine to create mind boggling complexity. I guarantee it is like no place that you have ever been or seen.









This amazing Santa was one of the first Geometric Celluloid toys to capture my attention. It truly is a "Ready Made", a masterpiece of perfect harmony. I found him, over 40 years ago, at one of the first Stormville Flea Markets. The yellow pedestal the toy is resting on is its original box. This wondrous object is the very essence of style and grace and perfect symmetry. I've studied it for hours as an artist, appreciating its lyric beauty. I've studied it as a toy designer, too, wondering if this was put together using standard factory parts, or if this pleasant work of art could have been conceived from scratch? The antlers and Santa's beard would indicate the later.

This sophisticated treasure cost all of five dollars, a modest beginning that launched me on a path to spending many times more than that on Geometric Celluloid, over the years. Nonetheless, in all the years that followed, I never found another like it. And, although, I have discovered other celluloid toys, wilder and more spectacular than it, none have pleased me more than this.



Here is an elegant example of Geometric Celluloid applied to Mickey Mouse. This is a large object, shown here actual size! The word spectacular comes to mind. The colorful car, itself, is everything. The Mickey part is secondary. He's just along for the ride. Every aspect of this sizeable toy is pleasing to the eye.

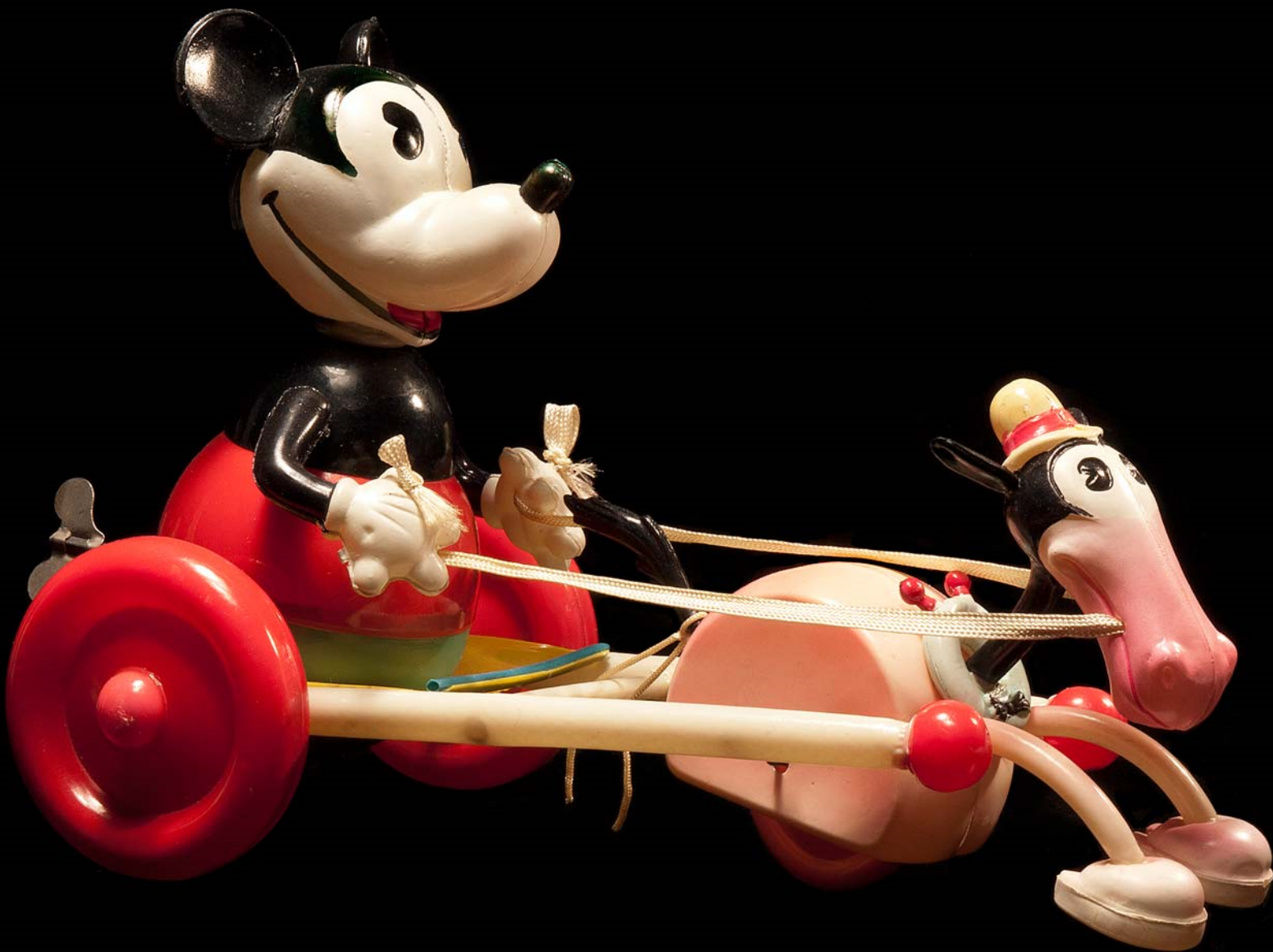




Here are two toys that are worth opening the case to retrieve and photograph together, on their own. The toy on the lower left is Betty Boop, and that on the right is Betty and Mickey Mouse. Two examples of this toy are known. The other was in Australia. My friend Carl Lobel tried to obtain it for years, and finally succeeded. It came in its original box, a large plain container with a relatively small label. That's the Lobel label on the left. This is one of those rare instances where Betty Boop and Mickey Mouse meet and appear together purposely, and illegally. This was no misunderstanding. The characters are not accidental lookalikes, but, as the label indicates, they are intended to be Betty and Mickey, brought together by design. The toy is called, "Time is Gold."



And, last of all, Geometry and Reality combine in one of the most desirable Celluloid toys of all time, Horace Horsecollar, pulling Mickey. Parts of both characters are Pure Geometry, while the rest is Pure Comic Imagery. This is a crossover on the road to "Comic Celluloid", and proof, again, that in the World of Comic Characters, Reality stops, and Anything goes! So let's hitch a ride with Mickey, and click the link below.



COMIC CELLULOID

Ladies and Gentlemen, Step Right Up, and Behold the Greatest Show on Earth, a Circus of Celluloid that, to this day, remains unmatched! Thank God for that! For all it would take is just one match, and with a mighty “POOF”, it would be gone, incinerated in a single flash.

As a medium for rendering imagery, celluloid was great! Unfortunately it had one fatal flaw, the tendency to immolate! Fragile, and often beautiful, celluloid not only enabled flights of fantasy, like those you see below, it was also the vehicle that made “The Movies” possible! And transparent sheets of celluloid, by the millions, called “cels”, for short, became the planes, on which the individual frames of animated films were traced. Without celluloid, the fabulous animation that brought the characters we knew and loved to life, never could have taken place.

When celluloid was banished from the Earth, due to its flammability, it was replaced by “acetate”. And thus, the Motion picture industry survived, and animation cels, as well, were, for a while, painted on acetate. Now, film, itself, and animation, too, has been computerized. But one element of magic that modern technology has not been able to replace, is the elegant enchantment of toys like those in this showcase.



Light as a feather, celluloid could be formed into toys that, seemingly, defied the laws of gravity. It enabled toymakers to create delicate images of impressive size, with very little weight. And tiny windup motors were all that were required to enable weightless acrobats to perform amazing feats, lighter than air, on the flying trapeze. Here, high above the center ring, assorted aerialists do their thing. Their stands, designed to rest on solid ground, have been rotated, upside down, and attached to the very top of the Big Top. Now, that's unique! Nowhere on Earth can stunts like this be seen! It takes a toy inventor, like me.



Below us, in the center ring, a spectacle is taking place, as three mighty pachyderms lead a Grand and Glorious Circus Parade.



Each time I see these elephants, I am reminded of a lovely day at Brimfield, one early May. A favorite dealer, who always saved great stuff for me, placed a plain brown box in my hand. It was not marked, apart from a number, rubber stamped on one end, and the tiny words, "Made in Japan." If I had to guess what it contained, judging from weight alone, I might have said the box was empty. I lifted the lid to find a miracle inside, Mickey and Minnie on a bright pink elephant! Oh My God! I had never seen one of these that started out complete. The toy was pristine, and all original! I could tell, for sure, because there was no hole in Mickey's hand.

I had assembled several of these toys in the past; and the replacement Miceys I managed to dig up always had a hole in their left hand, the telltale remnant of a former life, on, maybe, something, like a bike. So I inserted a small red celluloid cane where the handlebar had been. Other collectors, taking their cue from this, did the same, until it became generally believed that this was the way the toy was made. Not so! And this Mickey's hand had no hole. How can I convey the joy that welled up in me, on this occasion? Pure unadulterated elation! That is one of the greatest gifts God gave me, the ability to find great pleasure in something so simple, something that the entire world, except for a select few, would view as trivial.



I tried to photograph the Circus case, last week, with the Plexiglas in place. The results created such a feeling of dismay, that I was compelled to remove the Plexiglas today, and reset everything, just so. Toys move, you know. It's subtle, but over the years, (and sometimes overnight) they are no longer in the same place they were put. Thus, the photo that I shot, the other day, displayed a touch of disarray. And what was once a carefully coordinated whole, had taken on the appearance of a free-for-all. Too many things, all in one place! That's what this collection has become. Would that I could start again, in a much bigger space.



Even after 50 years, there are still some rarities here. On the upper tier, the only pristine, all original Mickey Mouse drummer that was not concocted, or put together, takes center stage. And off to the right, is the only original box discovered, to date. I will seize this opportunity, which might well be the only one I ever have, again, to place a few of these rarities before the camera's lens. Not having seen this Mickey Drummer, out of its setting, for many years, I am surprised at how large it really is.



Another toy that's proven, over time, to be one of a kind, is this small rubber band operated canoe with Mickey and Minnie inside. I got this treasure, 40 years ago, and have never seen another, since. At the time, I took a photo that my old computer ate, one, which I'll now attempt to recreate. It shows the boat afloat, on a river of cellophane, above its reflection in the water, which is, in fact, a picture puzzle, on which the toy, itself, was based.



The boating theme appears, again, on this pillow cover. It is one of a series of many designs produced by Vogue Patterns. This one has been impeccably embroidered with a perfect outline of black embroidery thread, and a subtle color change to render the ripples on the water. One of the pleasures of collecting Mickey is discovering how various images evolved, and how they interrelate. Each reoccurring image has a visual history. One can, often, trace them to their point of origin. Many images were issued officially, by means of "model sheets" or books and other publications, while others came about spontaneously.

Some of the most exciting images were based on misinterpretation, and wild unlicensed flights of the imagination. When one becomes immersed in early Disney, they can often tell, just from the look, alone, which year a product or a piece of art was made. So much was taking place in those ten years of Mickey's merchandising heyday, from 1930, when the first toys appeared to 1940, when his appearance changed.

Meanwhile, back at the circus, we see, cascading down the ramp, many variations of mice on bikes or riding in carts, some of which are pulled by Pluto. There are some Donalds, here, as well. And many of these toys have their original boxes, hidden deep under the canopy.

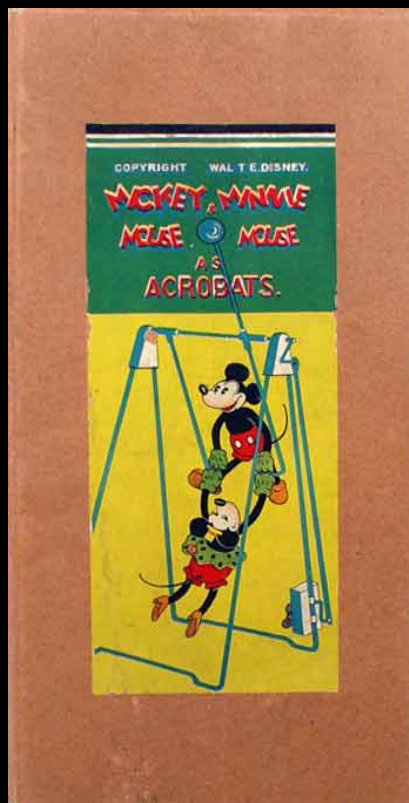


Boxes made for celluloid toys can often be attractive, but in a Circus Ring they just get in the way. The simple toy below has a box that is sweet and straight forward. It manages to disclose the complex working of the toy's quite awkward mechanism, yet portray it in a fashion that makes it look perfectly natural. The box art also tells a little story. We see Minnie appearing in the rear. While Japanese celluloid toys have a look that is universal, the boxes often display a delicate style that is distinctly Japanese. I wonder if, in the 1930s, anybody noticed that the label on the Mickey Drummer, above, pays homage to the Japanese flag, with its symbolic depiction of the rising sun?



Sometimes, the boxes were bread and butter boring, straight forward depictions of the actual toys, often drawn badly. At other times, the same toy could be packaged with such imagination that the toy, itself, paled by comparison. This makes me think of Colorforms, where I spent, (one might say squandered) 20 years. The magic of the box cover was everything on a Colorforms Stick On Toy. It was designed to romance and glorify the often deadly dull plain printed pieces that hid inside.

Here is one variation of a box that offered little to excite. A far superior variation is on the right.



Moving to a more modest case, we see more of the same. There are many rarities here, badly displayed. Front and center, is a walking Mickey made in Germany. He and these rather interesting geometric Mickey dancers, each the opposite color of the other, again, by choice, in black and white. Celluloid Mickeys, made in Germany are quite rare. There are a couple of German Felix celluloids, here, as well.



Not all celluloid was Japanese. This group, below, was made in Germany. An impulse told me to take them out of the case, above, and photograph them separately. Is it just me? For some reason I couldn't foresee, all together, like this, I suddenly find them Stunning! Stark, almost brutal, in their black and white simplicity. Notice the color range is limited to black and white and red and pink. I, just now, discovered that the double pull toy, with the two figures of opposite color polarity, has a unique mechanism that makes the platform with its two leering Mickeys rotate responsively. The motion is not haphazard, but locked in. These would have a showcase of their own if I had it to do all over again. And I would line it with black velvet, like this photo. Having captured these thoughts as they occurred to me. Now, let's see what the camera saw. WOW! Why do I love this photo? The power of this imagery was hidden, where it was displayed, up to now.



This walking quacking Donald really is a stunning toy. He deserves a portrait of his own. This is the only boxed version known. As for the toy, I believe there is one more. The animation is quite simple. As he rocks from side to side, his jaw opens and closes, and he makes a loud "quacking" sound that more resembles "Froggy the Gremlin" plunking his "Magic Twanger". or "Gerald Mc Boing Boing", "boinging" than it does a duck. The rocking motion causes his fixed position feet to waddle



Now, moving on ... This next showcase is much better composed than the last. Against a background that is a page out of the Columbia movie press book for the year Mickey Mouse began, we see a cornucopia of extraordinary things. Right in the middle, is a Mickey on a whirligig that is big and spectacular. On either side of him, are large figures of Mickey and Minnie. I once believed that celluloid mice came no larger than these. I was wrong, as you shall see. Among the other things in this showcase, is a wonderful wood carving from Spain of Mickey and Betty Boop together, with a mirror between. I love items, in which Mickey Mouse and Betty Boop become a couple. In terms of licensing, it's such a "no-no", kind of like Juliette and Romeo, their families, especially, Papa Walt, would not approve; not to mention Minnie! Minnie who?



On each side of the case, are a pair of Mickey and Minnie baby rattles. These are unusual, because of the heads on top. It would take a baby 30 seconds to bite them off. Such fragile lethal rattles are among those totally absurd playthings that would definitely be outlawed today; and so, they should be. Inside them, is a series of sharp metal spikes of different lengths that, when struck by a hanging pendulum, play a tune. Considering that the celluloid that separates these from the baby is as fragile as an eggshell, they were a calamity, waiting to take place. On the far left, is a Mickey Boy Scout, on a hike, with a canteen around his neck. His pink uniform indicates he's up to date. And next, Mickey Mouse and Betty Boop share an umbrella. Most interesting here is Mickey dancing with Betty, and, likewise, dancing with Donald too; not that there's anything wrong with that. And farther along, a little hard to see, is Betty and Mickey, walking their babies.

Then there are celluloid jointed dolls of Scrappy and Yippy, which pose the question: Was there a Margie? There must have been. And behind them, is Mickey pushing Minnie on a swing. This is a toy that I made up. It was such an obvious variation, waiting to happen, that I couldn't resist. Thinking back to the early days, when I did this, these toys were inexpensive, then, and creating playful combinations, provided they were not offered for sale, was considered fun, not forgery.

In 1975, a school teacher in Nebraska wrote one of the first books on Comic Character toys. Although, his book didn't state dollar values, it did rate each toy, of which he knew, individually, on a scale of one to twenty, based entirely on his own opinion, as to their rarity and desirability. Eventually, time proved what I knew instantly, that his assessments bore little resemblance to reality. Fortunately for me, he condemned Disney celluloid to the rock bottom of the list, giving them the embarrassing score of "1 to 4", the lowest of the low. No other toys even approached that modest score. The Charlie Chaplin Boxing Champion", a toy that I, in fact, created, by playfully enhancing a smudge on a generic figure's upper lip, got a score of, "14". The Little King "hand painted windup" got a "20".

In those days, there was so little known that books, like his, were influential in herding a growing flock of new collectors. And I was glad the sheep and lambs, were being taught that celluloid was "Baaaaaaaad!" This helped to keep the prices low, and, for a while, affordable.

From here, we move down a to a showcase, in which things get complicated, as some of the best celluloid and the best tin toys, as well, are all in the same place. The background is another stunning page from a very early press book.



Front and center, is a rare tumbling Mickey, that few collectors know exists. This is the only one I've ever heard of. The original box is here as well. To the right of it, is Mickey and Minnie dancing, a toy I assumed was out there somewhere, having seen the Elmer Elephant variations, all of which, themselves, are rare. Then, there is a Mickey on a platform with a small Pluto, who trots along, beside him. And just behind these, is my favorite Celluloid toy of all time. The unspeakably rare Skating Mickey. I got this toy from Doug and Pat Wengel, some of my favorite people, and I will always be grateful.

This is as close to a perfect Mickey image, as any I have ever seen. And it's construction is unique. Only celluloid could permit a 7 inch mouse to stand tall, and navigate on just one tiny roller-skate. With all our modern technology, there is no way a simple feat like this could be achieved, today. Celluloid, indeed, was the very stuff from which dreams could be made.



One doesn't have to be an artist to sense a commonality of look and feel in all these Celluloid toys. There is a distinct possibility that they were all designed and sculpted by one man, and, without a doubt, produced by the same factory in Japan. Certain unique designs were sent, exclusively, to specific countries, but all these toys are obviously close relatives, members, of a universal family.

Now, it's time to move on to the next page, "Tin Toys". Two of the best of them are right here, the Distler walking animated Mickey; Ecstasy, and the Mickey Motorcycle, as good a one as you will ever see.

We'll say more about them, soon. Meanwhile, there are some celluloid toys, elsewhere, that I should mention here. Both are in the showcase, which, since yesterday, for lack of a better name, I am calling "The Tall Tower".

The first, is this exquisite Mickey on a Scooter, with its very very early original box. Yes, I actually got this toy on eBay! Miracles have been known to happen there.



Miracles have, also, been known to happen, here! If you happen to be a toy collector, you might, perhaps, know that Hake's Americana has never stopped boasting about selling a toy like this, for quite a lot of money, a year, or two, ago. I assure you, this isn't it! Even so, you might wonder how a humble toy inventor, like myself, could afford such a treasure? The answer is simple, you need to be me! You need to do what I did, namely, spend a lot of time in art school! The end result of all that training, when successful, is invisible.

A visitor remarked, the other day, about the fact that in this house, full of a thousand works of art, none of "my own art" is on display? I replied: "Au contraire, my artwork is everywhere! Its embodied in every toy in this collection, beginning with the simple act of its selection. Choosing it, is all part of "my art". "My art" is also at play in the way the collection is displayed. And above all, I have touched every toy in the collection with a little or a lot of restoration, according to its wishes. If any toy you see here is less than perfect, that's not because I couldn't fix it. It's because the toy itself preferred to be that way. And, bottom line, the best examples of "my art" can only be judged as successful by the degree to which it can't be seen." The photos below will explain, exactly, what I mean;





Some would say, revealing this is a mistake. I have many friends who are dealers. They would consider it decreasing the value of the toy. I would answer that three ways. First of all, The restoration is for the sake of the toy and me. We are who I aim to please. And, furthermore, I have no intention of selling the toy, if I can help it. Secondly, if it is sold either during, or after, my lifetime, either way, I would not wish the buyer to be deceived. And, last of all, there are restorations, and there are restorations. It's just possible that a restoration, done by yours truly, might be more unique than the toy in mint condition would be.

This page has certainly traveled to places that I had not anticipated, but one thing led to another, and I just went with the flow. In spite of that, there are several celluloid toys I never got to, a whole case full of them behind me, and others, here and there, downstairs. But there is one toy that I would like to introduce here, and then, present it properly, later, on the page called, The Tall Tower.

Mind Blowing is not an expression that I like. But I don't know how to better describe this next surprise than to say, it sure as Hell blew mine. I got it at Atlantic City from one of my all-time favorite dealers, John Haley. This was in the great shows final days, when it had begun to fade and had taken on the ambiance of a totalitarian police state. On one of the set-up days, when there was a momentary lull in the pandemonium, John called me aside for one of his secret rendezvous. I knew this was my cue to be amazed, and have my checkbook ready.

I always got a tremendous kick out of John Haley. I realized, over time, that he is a very kind man inside, but dealing with him was challenging. He effected a Dickensian demeanor, like some cunning character from Oliver Twist, or, perhaps, John Worthington Foulfellow Fox, the charming villain who led Pinocchio astray. John made a big show of trying to be both sly and wily, and succeeded admirably. This time, wearing his familiar cloak of secrecy, he dramatically led me to an empty stall in the most deserted corner of the hall. And, after making sure the coast was clear, handed me what felt like an empty box, an ordinary corrugated carton, a fairly large one.

I cautiously opened the flaps and this is what I saw! Filling every corner of the box, as though it was custom made for it, was this, the biggest, most outrageously spectacular celluloid Mickey in the World! This object was way outside the parameters of my wildest dreams. Never had I fantasized the remotest possibility that a celluloid like this might exist. This photograph, taken, not long after the event, box and all, is actual size.



This awesome Mickey monument was perfect in every respect, except for a big piece of celluloid, missing from his cheek. Not that that mattered. The fact that a toy needed my assistance never bothered me. This idiosyncrasy gave me a certain edge, for dealers could offer me things that others would not accept. Nonetheless, the flaw saved me a pretty penny. Which didn't help much, considering that the price was calculated in dollars, many! Of course, I had to have it, this casually packaged tsunami of Nirvana.

After the usual make believe negotiations,(John always knew when he had me) I literally flew back to my booth, set free from Earth's gravity. This elation inspired levitation was facilitated by a lightness in my wallet! Ow! The ceiling of the Atlantic City convention center was lower than I thought!

I quickly buried this treasure, deep within the labyrinth of cartons, that hid beneath the cloth draped table, and didn't mention it to anybody, not even Noel. I spent the rest of the weekend in a mixed state of euphoria and paranoia, floating on cloud nine, while obsessing over the giant Mickey's vulnerability, and fantasizing that felons, with mouse sniffing dogs, might stalk the deserted aisles of the convention hall at night. When I finally got Mickey safely home, he stayed in his box for a long time, as I relived and savored the exquisite experience of seeing him for the first time!

Mickey and I had many long and serious conversations, discussing how to repair him. It was a monumental challenge, not like a missing ear, which I could, easily fabricate, and then, paint black. This missing piece was not only in the worst place, it also needed to be pristine white unpainted celluloid, of exactly the right shade, slightly ivory, perfectly formed and trimmed to fit.

I looked in vain for some white toy that I might sacrifice. And I discovered that I simply didn't have it in me, the ability to do harm, to any toy in my collection in order to do good to one that was considered better. I would just have to wait for the right transplant to come my way. Meanwhile, I rehearsed the hypothetical operation in my mind, many times. This procedure was going to be one that I could either make or break. There was a lot at stake!

Several days passed, before I finally decided to take Mickey out of the box. I had been afraid to touch him. As I turned him over to see if there were any markings, I heard the sound of something very light moving around inside. I turned him over, again, to see what it might be, and as I did, out through the hole in his cheek, flew the missing piece! A Miracle! How long had it been hiding in there, days, weeks, months, or years? With a needle dipped in crazy glue, dot by dot, I stitched the perfectly fitting fragment back in place again! Now, Mickey stands complete, in the very center of The Tall Tower. We will visit him, there, soon.

MICKEY TIN TOYS

I remember the very moment, standing on the field at Brimfield, when I heard something so exciting that I thought the teller of this news was lying. I had been collecting Mickey avidly for many years, and thought I knew a lot about him. Some fellow collectors, too, believed that I knew more than many about what Mickey things were made. It's true that I had studied the Kay Kamen Catalogues, gone to Disney Licensing, in NYC, to photograph them, long before they were generally known, and committed every page to both film and memory.

Yes, I knew a lot, too much, maybe, for I had transcended the glorious days when each new item I acquired was an enlightening discovery. It was still exciting to find something that I knew existed, but that was not quite the same as finding something fabulous I never dreamed was made. And, bit by bit, the more discovering became merely acquiring, the more bored with Mickey I became. Did I dare let the thought enter my head that, someday, I might tire of collecting him? Maybe!

So, here I was, chatting with this dealer, whose name I have forgotten, but I didn't forget what he told me. He swore that he had seen Mickey Mouse Tin Toys! Apart from the Chain Drummer and the Sparkler, I had never seen or heard of such a thing! Seeped in American naivety, it never occurred to me that, at one time, Mickey also ruled in many kingdoms across the sea, England, France, Spain, Italy and Germany. Nor did I realize that each had produced their own unique varieties of Mickey merchandise.



So, I filed what he said away, and it didn't cross mind again for several years, until the first Kennedy Airport International Toy Show took place in the mid-70s. There were dealers there from Europe, and Oh My God! That changed Everything! Suddenly, my interest was renewed! And yes, there were Tin Toys too! The opening of the doors to Europe, more than any other factor, accounts for the fact that I continued collecting Mickey.

The Airport shows, three times a year, were soon joined by an even bigger show, in Atlantic City, twice a year, and there were European sellers there! Suddenly, it was a whole new World! The Comic toys that were made in Europe were often more exciting and creative than much of what had been made here. I soon developed relationships with the leading European dealers, one or more in every country. As a collector, my secret weapon was discretion, and my ability to keep a secret. Thus, a dealer had nothing to lose by showing me things first, and so it was, from secret meetings, often, days before the shows began, that my collection grew.

Collectors across the country, who didn't live near New York or Atlantic City, were at a distinct disadvantage. My friend John Fawcett, for example, due to his teaching schedule, could not attend these shows. Not that he would have, anyway. Brimfield, alone, and running wanted ads in antique papers, no longer made one competitive, in terms of growing a collection. Although, foreign Felix and Mickey toys were suddenly washing up on America's shores in droves, I and a few others, kept the beach well combed. John shifted his main interests to collecting the Lone Ranger, who was American grown!

One of the first tin toys to appear, over here, was the Distler Mickey Hurdy-Gurdy. The first was ballyhooed by its boastful new owner as the Find of the Century. It was a total wreck. And for a tail, Mickey had a shoelace. No one, at that time, even realized that there was supposed to be a Minnie. Then a complete one appeared in an auction at Sotheby's, in London. My friend, Chet Murayama bought it, at a record setting price, and the rat race was on!

One after another, more Hurdy-Gurdies appeared in a various states of disrepair. Many had an arm replaced. Few had a Minnie there. She was rare. That is, until someone I won't name had a flock of phony Minnies made. I'm afraid I spoiled his game, when I recognized its illegitimacy in a heartbeat. He quickly maintained they were not intended to deceive, and changed his tune, and the price too! Somehow, in all this mouse confusion, I ended up with two Hurdy-Gurdies. I kept the better of the two, and passed the other on to Harry K. Eventually, several with original boxes appeared at auction. "Too rich for my blood". as my Mother used to say.



Of all the rare toys in this showcase, my favorite "item" is the small tin Mickey Orchestra. I have never seen another set, complete and uniform, like these. The only grouping that approaches it was made up of assorted pieces, some with different colored backgrounds. I first laid eyes on these, upon walking into John Haley's hotel room at one of the first airport shows. Chet Murayama was a few paces ahead of me. We both saw them simultaneously. He reached out and gathered the set together, (while my heart was breaking) and handed them to me! That seemed like the nicest thing anybody ever did for me! I am grateful to this day. As they are flat, they all stacked up and fit easily into my breast pocket, where they remained, throughout the weekend. In a manner of speaking, that is where they remain, still close to my heart, today. Chet, by the way, is a success story, he, eventually, sold his fabulous toy collection and used the proceeds, as planned, to fulfilled his lifelong dream of owning a spectacular home in Hawaii.

Also in this showcase, top and center, is the fabulous "Slate Dancer." This is one of the major pieces in the European Tin Toy repertoire. Mickey dances when the crank is turned. On either side of the Slate dancer, are a pair of Mickey Drummers. On the left, is one of several variations made in Germany, in which Mickey has teeth. And, on the right, is one of the few Mickey tin toys made in the USA by Chein. The other is the sparkler, barely visible, in the upper left. Atop the pillar, on the right, is a tin saxophone player with clashing cymbals on his feet. Also in this case, are several small dolls by Deans Rag Book Company, a windup celluloid Crawling Mickey with a fabric covered body, and a French perfume bottle made of glass that wobbles, precariously, on legs that are a pair of springs. Another delicious rarity, in this showcase is a delicate paper fan that portrays a scene in Mushroom Land, where Mickey Mouse and Betty Boop merrily dance. Their arms and legs are very wiggly silken strings.



Now, to revisit the other showcase, and say a few more things about the Tipp Company Mickey Minnie Motorcycle, which is generally considered to be at the pinnacle of all the fabled European Tin Mickey Mouse toys.

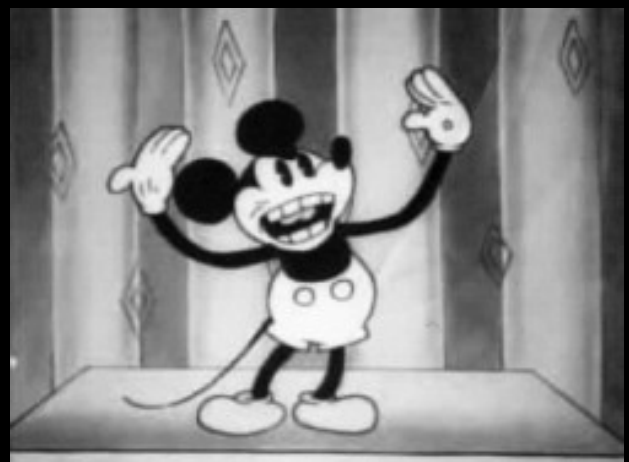
Herein lies another tale. Two came up for sale, at Sotheby's, in London. A good friend, who was my secret weapon, went over to bid on them for me. One looked fantastic in the catalogue. The other looked a mess. One reason a decent motorcycle was hard to get is because, as part of Tipp's manufacturing process, they were originally coated with shellac. Over time, this coating became sticky. My friend Stuart Cropper, another favorite English dealer, who has, since, become a part-time neighbor, went to the viewing and relayed some distressing news to me. Sotheby's had been allowing every visitor at the showing to handle the motorcycles. And the one that once looked, and was, fantastic in the catalogue, was now black with dirt from everybody's hands. The shellac was like a dirt magnet. Stuart suggested that the other one that looked so awful in the photos, might, now, be the better of the two, as what looked like missing paint might actually be bits of the original tissue wrapping that had adhered to the sticky surface. In the end, my emissary bought them both for me.

That proved to be a wise decision. Stuart was right in his supposition, the one that looked so horrible was actually mint! It had, most likely, never been played with, but the original tissue it was wrapped in at the factory, had adhered, here and there, to the sticky surface. It took only a little soap and water to remove it, and the coat of shellac, as well. The tissue had marred the surface sheen in places, but the color was in tact, and perfect, and I was all right with that. The other motorcycle was a different story. I toiled over it for hours, trying, in vain, to get it clean, without harming the lithography. I barely got it into good enough condition to recoup its cost, by passing it onto a friend, for what I paid. Nonetheless, when all is said and done, it remains today, one of the better ones.

The photograph that tops this page is my motorcycle, photographed on a sunny day, sitting on the roof of the car in the driveway. I took the photo, some years ago, and posted it on my eBay page.

The last tin toy I will mention here is one of my all-time favorites. I will attempt to photograph it in a way that captures a little of its unique animation. This shows the change of expression, but in reality, Mickey, also, dances wildly as a counter weight rotates inside. Although, Hurdy-Gurdies continued to appear and the Motorcycles began to roll out, non-stop, this toy remained one of the rare ones. The condition is near mint. By the way, I will never touch up a toy that is this close to perfection. Even though, a dot of paint would do it, this state of preservation is too precious to upset.

The styling here appears outrageous; one might even say, grotesque! This is not the Mickey that the Walt Disney Company has endeavored to promote. But this is truly Mickey, as he was originally, teeth and all. This toy was clearly adapted quite accurately from, and inspired by Mickey, singing, "Minnie's Yoo Hoo." He's not referring to a chocolate flavored drink. Mickey's first presentation of the song that was to become his theme song appeared in the 1930 cartoon "Mickey's Follies". It was, later, reedited and distributed to theaters participating in the Mickey mouse Club. The longer version, shown at every meeting, invited the audience to sing along.





THE TALL TOWER

Visitors, here, often inquire how the Great Wall was constructed. I reply, "It is the work of my friend and Master Carpenter, Bill Maxwell". Like everything he ever did, Bill made it all look easy. When we first moved to the country, I was doing everything myself. I even built the second story, where I am sitting, at the moment. But an accidental fall at Colorforms, in which I broke six ribs, ended my amateurish attempts at carpentry, and brought Bill Maxwell into my life. And thus, that mishap turned out to be a lucky break for me.

The first day Bill appeared, I watched him do more in an hour than I could accomplish in a day. A few days later, he asked me, how long I would need his services. I replied, "Consider it your career!" Bill and I worked together in perfect harmony. I drew the blueprints. He did the carpentry. He loved the unconventional things I asked him to do. And when I was making a mistake, Bill would quietly say, "What if we did it this way?" He was always correct. Bill Maxwell was a gentle man and a gentleman.

The Great Wall started out as five free standing units, that was as far as I could see ahead. Then, we set them in place and intuitively positioned the connecting shelves. Here you see Bill, spray painting the entire thing, along with assorted pedestals and the pyramid for bisques. There's no point making this photo big, for it is as blurry as my memory of those delightful days.



When the wall was almost finished, I realized I would need more space. And thus, Bill built this free standing unit, taller than the rest. The other day, trying to organize this website, I arbitrarily named it, "The Tall Tower," and that it is! 12 feet tall, all full of Mickeys! We shall explore it, beginning at the bottom.





Space here is at a premium. Therefore, just because something is on the bottom shelf, doesn't mean it isn't great! This showcase is dominated by the Mickey Mouse Aluminum Coffee Set. I had adapted its cover image of Mickey to the first Mickey toy I ever did. I found a tiny picture of it, in one of the catalogues I'd photographed at Disney, never dreaming I'd ever see, let alone get, the actual set.

Years later, at Brimfield, I watched in shock as a good friend and fellow collector Phil Ellenbogen, bought the only known example of this rare aluminum coffee set, right out from under me. It was complete and in the box with even the original paper napkins; the only one that ever turned up, as far as I know. After a decade of trade negotiations, I finally took it home.



A dense, colorful display of vintage Mickey Mouse merchandise. The background features a large, stylized Mickey Mouse head. In the foreground, various items are arranged: a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse plush toy, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts, a Mickey Mouse figurine in a red shirt and black shorts. The items are set against a backdrop of a large, stylized Mickey Mouse head. The display is a dense collection of vintage Mickey Mouse merchandise, including figurines, plush toys, and boxes, set against a backdrop of a large, stylized Mickey Mouse head. The items are arranged in a way that showcases the variety of products available, from small figurines to larger plush toys. The colors are vibrant and nostalgic, reflecting the classic branding of Mickey Mouse. The overall composition is a celebration of the character's enduring popularity and the collectible nature of these items.

Moving up one case, I feel embarrassed. It's almost painful, the way some things are crammed in here. At the very back, is a fabulous item, "Mickey Mouse Funny Facts", a magic electric answer game, complete with all the sheets of questions, fashioned in the form of a book. It's extraordinary to find one of these complete! Its extraordinary to be able to find it in this showcase! Also hiding here, are both the oval lunch pails, American and Italian, in mint condition, with proper handles, inner trays, and everything. Among the things that are easier to see, is a pristine matched pair of dolls by Dean, with an unusual color scheme, a Mickey mirror, made of porcelain, of the same design as the Maw toothbrush holder, a pair of egg-shaped vases from Germany, a Mickey candle holder from England, and a black and white covered candy dish from Spain. Mickey is kneeling on the cover, with his tail, (at least, I think that is his tail), curiously placed.



Let's move in closer, now, to get a better look at some extraordinary things. In the center, is one of a series of German tin Mickey Banks. These are considered rare. There are several different images, in the series; I can't remember if it's four or three. Mickey's red tongue, which is actually a tray, pops out to swallow the money. And here, also, is one of the only two sets of Mickey Mouse Britain's that I know to exist. My friend, Bernie Shine has the other one, in the original box. Last, but not least, is one item that I always wanted, and I finally got, the only one I've ever seen, which is ...



Deans Rag Book Mickey, riding on a tricycle. If there are any more of these around, my guess would be they are in England. Then again, I have, admittedly, been out of touch for years. There was a time ten years or so ago, when I knew many people's collections, as well as I did my own. Now, there are not as many collections left to know. Many of the old time collectors have lost interest and bailed out. Only a few of us remain, today: Bernie Shine out in LA, John Fawcett, up in the state of Maine, who now has his own museum, Carl Lobel, in Vermont, who continues to distill his collection down to the quality of fine wine, and myself. We are the only old time Comic Character Collectors, I know personally, who survive.



OK! Here we are in the Main Case! And right in the center, as I promised, is the Giant Mickey celluloid ... toy? Idol? effigy? I'm not sure what the best word would be. But I do know that it is stunning, a fitting object for iDOLLatry! I bet you can't see where I fixed the cheek!



But it's not the only great object in this case. Looming over everything, is the most super perfect pair of Steiff Mickey and Minnie dolls that I've ever seen, anywhere. Then, all along the left side, is a gathering of Mickey dolls, by Dean. The wooden jointed ones are by Dean, too, as is the velvet Pluto. This case also contains several of the earliest items known, especially, those that are made of wood, the Cart, on the left, the Ramp-Walker, on the right, and the Jumping Jack, higher up. If you look carefully, you'll find several smaller dolls by Steiff, and the French version of a wooden Mickey doll. Oh, and there's a big Mickey on the right, purported to be by Charlotte Clark, that I'm not convinced is right!



Here are three fresh faces, shining bright! On the left, a sparkling Steiff, a French wood jointed doll, on the right, and, in the middle, a genuine seven and a half inch bisque. Several years ago, a forger tried to fake large bisques by casting the 9' version, which after shrinkage came out at 7 and a half. A leading "expert" in NYC got stuck with 12 of these. Naturally, it was me, who realized the forgery, and sounded the alarm. The felon had painted them with Liquitex, which I could spot a mile away. Anyway, real seven and a half inch bisques do exist. They are very rare; this is one of the few known.



Oh, and look who's here!



And before we depart, check out this small charming Italian car. Beside it, is a perfect bisque Mickey, with moveable arms that, surprisingly, was made in Germany.



We are climbing the Tower slowly, there are many more spectacular sights to see. Now, take a look at these! There are some fabulous treasures on this, almost, upper level. Right in the center are a trio of dolls by Charlotte Clark. They are prime examples of Charlotte in her prime, and Pluto was part of the package when they were purchased, in person, by their former owners, in the 1930s.



In front of these, are a rare pair of Mickey and Minnie, made by Lenci, with original labels, handwritten on parchment. Their funny little rolling eyes are a unique variety. Standing next to Minnie, is an intricate wood jointed Mickey, made in Italy or Germany. On the left of the Lenci Mickey, is an object that makes me crazy, a German Easter decoration, the subject of a long lasting obsession. Then, in a line, are three prime Desmo Radiator ornaments, big, and spectacular. The Mickey, on the left, is the rarer of the three. Along a little, is another radiator ornament, origin unknown, but handsome and imposing. Behind him, speaking of imposing, is an amazing Spanish wine jug. Mickey the virtuoso is clad in a tuxedo. In his hand is a violin. Liquid pours out of his nose. In the back of the showcase, on either side, are velvet jointed dolls from France.



Here are two more photos, shot from an angle, to offer, yet, another view. Right out in the very front, are a series of five wood jointed figures. These were made in Germany. There is so much happening in this showcase, it is a mass of jumbled imagery, glistening with complicated chromium reflections. Yes, it is confounding and confusing to the eye, but it also is EXCITING!



Here are a couple of unique dolls of Mickey and Minnie, made by the "Paris Novelty Company". How continental! The name brings to mind my days in France. Yes, these dolls must have been made in the French part of Japan! And they are extraordinary; as are the Popeye, Olive Oyl, and Betty Boop dolls made by the same company, which you will see, eventually. In front of them, is a serious object, made in Germany. It is a cigarette lighter that really means business. Mickey's tail is a heavily insulated cord. On the end is a three pronged plug, designed to be inserted into 220 volts of European current. Then, pick Mickey up, and stick a cigarette in his butt, which is continuously aglow with red-hot wires, and he will, either, light it for you, or electrocute you!



This is an earlier photo that shows the original boxes, abundantly adorned with flags of France!



Of all the objects in this case, the one that I feel compelled to remove and photograph separately is the German Mickey Easter decoration. This dazzling black and white hallucination belonged to Phil and Elaine Ellenbogen. It was always my favorite thing in their collection. To say it glowed, would be an understatement, for it is actually covered in minute reflective beads of glass. Whenever I visited Phil and Elaine, we would open the basement door to descend to the collection, which was attractively displayed, downstairs, and in the darkness, reflecting the light from the open door, I would see this glorious Easter egg, glowing bright orange, in the unlit cellar, below. The same thing happened, in reverse, when it was time to go. Throughout years and years of Brimfield shows, Phil and Elaine were tough, but friendly, competition. The fact that there were two of them, both equally intense and knowledgeable, made them almost unbeatable, especially, when they split up, and covered two fields, at once.

But what kind of people are they? Passionately intense about collecting, every bit as much as I am, and seriously competitive. They beat me to many a treasure that I would have loved to own. And, of course, they knew it, and playfully enjoyed it. In the end I came to learn that their intense urge for acquisition and appetite for competition was exceeded only by their generosity. When, some years ago, they began a new adventure and to finance it, parted with part of their collection, they magnanimously offered me all the items I had missed, at prices that did not exceed what they would have cost me if I got them at the flea market to begin with. May every collector be blessed with friends like this! Oh, did I say "In the end"? The fact is, the end is far from near, Phil and Elaine are collecting again, with renewed passion, this time aided and abetted by their daughter Brittany. So, having said too much already, here he is, the legendary Easter Mickey!



Now, perched precariously on a ladder, we scale the heights, to see a sight that I, myself, have only witnessed once or twice, the upper showcase! For lack of a more accessible place, here are another pair of dolls by Lenci. This time, Mickey & Minnie are horsing around with Pluto. He is a Lenci too. And I am surprised to see a large Mickey Cowboy. I wondered where he went. There is also one of those French jointed dolls that I like so much. This one is felt. We just saw a few of the velvet variety, in the case below. And, last of all, two mystery dolls. These are very early dolls, commissioned and distributed by George Borgfeldt, in the early 30s. The actual manufacturer is unknown. One is cotton, the larger, rarer, one is velvet.



And now, with twilight falling, we glance back for one last look at the Tall Tower. Actually, I just happen to like this photo. I shot it, almost, accidentally, setting up for the central case. But, I like the twilight lighting, casting a blue glow. And the photo, not only, offers some perspective, it also shows the delightful piece of carpet that I was told was cut from one that graced a New York City movie palace, something like RKO, in the 1930s. It is so deliciously Art Deco, pink stars and spotlights, echoes of "Mickey's Gala Premiere". Beneath it, is a very major smoking stand, with a serious cast iron tail.



Slowly but surely, we're dealing with Mickey. But we still have a long way to go.

LOWER CASES

I can't believe we're half way done. This has turned out to be a bigger project than I anticipated. But a lot has been accomplished. It's sort of like a jigsaw puzzle; the border has been finished, as well as some major areas of the interior. Now, it's just a matter of filling in some empty spaces, and finding the right places for the remaining pieces. Some areas on the Great Wall have been ignored, until now. The time has come to catch them up. Those located, below the belt of Comic Noddies, I'm referring to as The Lower Cases.

Starting from the left, the first showcase that we come to is this, a kind of catch all, without a theme. Damn! There are some great things here! I'm, already, tempted to photograph them separately. In case you haven't noticed, I'm writing this in real time, thinking out loud, and going with whatever impulse moves me. Let's look at the photo that I shot a few weeks ago.

Oh, WOW! The photo's more than adequate! I can post it almost life-size. But there also is a lot to say! So, before we get to the actual showcase, let me show this photo below. It is one of several known shots of Walt Disney, in the early years, surrounded by the very first Mickey Mouse merchandise! There are better shots of Walt than this that are printed in books, in which he isn't covering as many of the objects. But this is an actual photo, and what one can see here, is clearer than any book would be.

I have studied the photos in this series for years, trying to discern and identify the mysterious objects that they show. It has always been a kind of challenge, and a guide, to try to find these treasures, or, at least, find out what they are. I have duplicated and discerned many. Many more, remain a mystery.



I could discuss this photograph for hours, from big things to little things, like the fact that they didn't realize that a tiny Minnie they placed with the small stuff, above, is actually the Minnie from the Hurdy-Gurdy. The reason I posted the photo here, is because, on the floor at the back center, beyond the set of china, and in front of the box of hankies, tied with a ribbon, and the pictorial tray made by British Veterans, is the rare Mickey Mouse Doorstop that you can see, in person, front and center, in the showcase below. So far, I only know of two of these. Phil and Elaine Ellenbogen own the other. There are other Mickey Doorstops out there, but only this one was legitimately licensed by Walt Disney. And the Photo proves its authenticity.

In the background of the showcase, are the Mickey Minnie Paper Dolls. Then, top center, is the first Mickey doll, distributed by George Borgfeldt. It bears the original "NIFTY" label. Ironically, it's held on by a gold "safety" pin. In those days, before child safety laws, that was about as safe as safety got. The smaller version is there, as well. The Spears Stencil Set is also in the Disney photo. Walt is sitting in front of it in this pose. The smaller version is on the floor.



And then, there are two items in the case, above, that I adore. One is the exquisitely crouched Mickey, on the right, made, very early on, in Germany. This is an actual commercial product with eyes made of glass, and a custom tailored stand. It's a miracle that he survived the War, with his vest that resembles a prayer shawl, he might have been thought to be a rabbi! All kidding aside, there is something powerful about this image, while quaint and charming, at the same time.



And then there is this wood jointed Popeye doll, that was made in Mexico. Of all the Popeye items that I owned, of which few, if any, proved to be unique, my favorite was a wood and composition doll of Wimpy, also made in Mexico. It is the only one that I or anyone had ever seen. I always dreamed of finding the other figures in what must have been a series.

Eventually the Popeye cases got so full that there was no space for Popeye left. The fact is, I couldn't squeeze another in. And after having talked with an obsessive Popeye collector friend, on the phone for, sometimes, several hours every day, my head was starting to feel the same. Eventually I acquired a chronic case of Popeye fatigue.

This appears to be Phil Ellenbogen day. I just recalled that it was he who steered this Popeye doll my way! Finally a Fresh Face! Not only, was he a Popeye I had never seen, but one that Wimpy and I had fantasized about for years. Now, Ironically when he finally arrived, I couldn't find an inch of space, in any Popeye case, to squeeze him in. And so, he stands here with a door stop and a German rabbi in a lower case, where, at least, he can be seen.



Moving to the right one step, we come to a showcase that is Spectacular! It's filled with a crowd of dolls by Knickerbocker. Every time I met a Knickerbocker mouse that fell within the range of adequately ordinary to exquisitely extraordinary, I offered it an invitation, engraved on a blank check, to come and live at my house. As you can see, many did. There are some nice mice here, Bandleaders, Cowboys and a rare Cowgirl Minnie. In the center is a Marx Bros. of Boston Mickey Jack in the Box, with a Knickerbocker head. There is also a Wells Brimtoy Humming Top, in a lovely box, and a colorful six piece bisque orchestra, made in Germany. Mickey did not make a hit with Hitler. Therefore, his life in Germany was short lived. But he did the best he could with limited time. Here is a Mickey Minnie Handcar, English style, by Wells Brimtoy, as well. And, last of all, two rather rare yellow wood and composition Mickey dolls.



The next showcase is frozen in time. I always found it pleasing to my eye. So, it has remained unchanged for 30 years. I remember when I got that drum. It was at Schupp's Grove in 1968. A young couple beat me to it. I had little money then, but they had even less than me. So I managed to talk them into selling it to me. None of us knew, then, how rare it would prove to be? The tin drum, itself, is stunning with its dramatic image of Mickey Bursting out of the front. It was, most likely, manufactured for Borgfeldt by Chein. Even the original drumsticks are here.

The showcase itself is lined with the cutout panels from Post Toasties cereal boxes. In the bleak days of the Depression, these images offered the children of an impoverished nation a wealth of playthings they could afford. There are also a trio of dolls, all distributed, early on, by Borgfeldt. Two are by Steiff, and the third, on the right, is one of the even earlier types. Below these, on either side, are a pair of Mickey and Minnie folk art wooden door stops, and in the lower corners of the case, are a pair of ceramic banks made in France. It is interesting, the way the figures interact. Minnie, adopts a pose that is alluring, fluttering her eyelashes and a fan. Clearly, Mickey is intrigued.

In the very center of the case, is a group of extraordinary things: A Steiff Mickey on a go-cart, as nice an example as I have ever seen. Next to him, is a European variation of the Mickey Tin Drummer, with an expression that is unique. This is in its original plain brown box. Leaning against one wheel of Mickey's scooter is a precious tin Mickey pin. When one attaches it to their lapel and pulls on Mickey's tail, he tips his hat. More precious still, is a teeny tiny pair of Mickey and Minnie dolls. They are hand crocheted. Mickey looks slightly distraught, and exclaims, Oy Vey! Minnie holds the baby.



This lower case couldn't be more out of the way. Nonetheless, it holds some interesting things: A graphically stunning target game by Marx Bros. dominates the case. I think I must have every Mickey thing they ever made. Unfortunately, most of it is packed away. They were the manufacturer who offered the World most of the most exciting Mickey Graphics, in the early days. On either side, are two smaller variations of Spears stencil sets, and in front of those, a curious pair of pull toys, Mickey and Pluto, made in France. In spite of the fact that they are marked and "Manufactured", they were entirely made by hand.

There are a pair of telephones by the Gong Bell Toy Company. I always found the things they made perplexing, pull toys, toy telephones etc., all heavy objects, made of steel. They were so strong one could drive a truck over them and not put a dent in them. On the other hand, the key element, on each, the Mickey Mouse, itself, was always just a fragile piece of cardboard. Of note, also in this case, is an Ingersoll watch display card, with the very watch it was intended to display, as well as a small wooden Mickey, manufactured to display a Mickey pocket watch. Moving right along, we come to a Santa/ Mickey Hand Car, made by Lionel Trains. I keep its unattractive box upstairs. And, in front of all of this, is a selection of glazed porcelain odds and ends, made in Germany and Japan.



In the far corner of the Wall, is an often overlooked showcase. The potpourri of objects in it, all deserve a better place. Many are good old, old fashioned, characters out of the funny papers. In the upper left corner, is a large Mickey doll from France, and then, two more Felix the Cats, One of which is staring at a unique effigy of a "Cady Bug", by Harrison Cady. At the very top, is the absolutely awesome Scarecrow. Close to 100 years old, he looks like he was made yesterday. Well talk about him when we get to the Oz page. Next to him, is a pristine mint, large and impressive doll of the Matador from the Disney short, Ferdinand. Like the Three Little Pigs, this seven minute Silly Symphony generated a sizeable amount of merchandise.

Moving down, we come to a selection of Barney Google and Spark Plug things: The best pair of dolls of them that were made. a highly stylized perfume bottle, and a match holder. Only Rube Goldberg could conceive of a more elaborate way to hold a box of matches. And then, is a rather amazing doll of Happy Hooligan. He's not only good looking, which would be more than enough for me, he has a unique feature, one on the cutting edge of early 20th Century technology. When the bottle he holds in his hand is raised to his lips, his nose lights up, bright red! Miraculously, it still operates today, in spite of the fact that there is no way to change the bulb.



PUPPET CASE

I could write a book about the first three puppets, and what it took to get them. I'll try not to. Mickey, Minnie, Pluto, they belonged to a collector in Philadelphia. My friend, Al Horen took me to visit him. He was a sad man, with an anger in him, browbeaten by a wife who was a beauty operator, with the look of Trixie and the edgy personality of Alice on the Jackie Gleason Show. She smoked, chewed gum dramatically, and blabbed on the telephone, nonstop, all the while that we were there. They lived in a row house in Philly. This guy, whose name escapes me, was forced, by her, to keep his collection of, mostly, comic books in the basement, packed in cardboard cartons, in her laundry room. Out of one box, he pulled these puppets.

As they were so different than the other things that he'd amassed, I asked if he might ever sell them. He said, "maybe". End of conversation! Several months later, he came to NYC, and dropped in to visit me. I learned that, later, he was ranting about the fact I had a college education. It was all so very strange. There was certainly nothing else about me that he could envy, so he ended up picking up on the fact that I had attended college, as if, sitting, for endless art school hours, drawing naked ladies, was the same thing as learning literature and history. He told Al, there was no way that he'd ever sell those puppets to me.

Meanwhile, one day, a stranger came to the front door of our apartment, beating on it loudly, and insisting that I let him in. Reciting his reputable resume, he refused to go away. His name was Robert. He was a stockbroker, and he was obsessed with collecting Mickey Mouse timepieces. And he was also obsessed with Robert Lesser, who was another collector of comic timepieces in NYC, those days. Robert number two was determined to beat Lesser to the goal of getting every Mickey Mouse watch ever made. And I had one he was obsessing over. Eunice had given it to me for Christmas, a Mickey Mouse lapel watch, in the box.

This guy proved to be the most relentlessly pushy compulsive individual I had ever met. One would need to invent a new word, several times stronger than "chutzpah," to describe him. He was literally driving me crazy, as he obsessed, nonstop, about the watch. Finally, in a mixture of inspiration and exasperation, I came up with a brilliant plan! As this fellow had proven himself so persistent in working on me, I decided to sic him, and his powers of persuasion, on the man in Philly. And so, I made him a proposal: If he could get those puppets for me, he could have the watch! BINGO!

Robert bedeviled the guy in Philly, until he agreed to sell them to him, and set it up with him. But he insisted that I travel with him, to keep him company on the journey, as he didn't want to ride the train alone. Of course, when he actually went to the guy's home, I would have to lay low. Al, who lived in Philly, picked us up at the station, and drove Robert to the man's house and dropped him off. Meanwhile, Al and I circled the block, ... for hours. Things were not going well, inside. Once Bob got there, the seller changed his mind. They nearly came to blows. Somehow, they thrashed it out, and I got the puppets. Bob got the watch!

The three puppets were my pride and joy. Here they are, hanging in our apartment in Manhattan. They, along with their original boxes, got their own tall showcase at the Bambergers Show. Although, the puppets were made by Hestwood, this set did not come from Bullock's Wilshire, in California, like most examples that are known. The original price tags show that these were sold by Gimbals, in Philadelphia.





Several years later, on a sunny day at Brimfield, I acquired three more puppets. Horace, Clarabelle, and Donald. Later, that same day, I found a giant Knickerbocker Easter Mickey. This was the best Brimfield ever! In 1978 the entire set was displayed on this two page spread in an article in "Americana Magazine".



Horace, Clarabelle, and Donald who has a moving mouth, are to date, the only examples known. A man in California, who sold me the celluloid Horace and Mickey, claims to have a Horace. Bernie Shine has a set of The Three Pigs, which are, also, the only examples known of those. A photo in an old playthings Magazine shows an audience of kids, wearing paper masks of the Big Bad Wolf and the Three Pigs, and the caption reads that they are watching a performance of the Three Little Pigs by the Hestwood Marionettes, so there must have been a wolf, as well.

Shortly after the article appeared, Bob Baker a well-known puppeteer and puppet maker, in LA, called me. He had copied and produced the Mickey and Minnie's marionettes for sale at Disneyland, at a price nearly as high as what the originals cost me. He seemed like a nice guy. We spoke for 3 hours. He asked me to send him my puppets, so he could copy them for Disney. I said, "No way". I was not willing to take a chance that anything would happen to them. But, on the other hand, if Disney would insure them and offer me something like another poster as compensation, I would lend them to him. Disney had already traded me several posters, in previous negotiations, so this request was not as farfetched as it might seem. Bob said, he didn't see why not. It sounded like a good idea to him. He'd run it past them, and get back to me. I never heard from him again. He did copy the puppets, anyway, based on the photos in Americana Magazine. Why he made them 20", twice as large as they should be, to go with his Mickey and Minnie, always mystified me.

When we moved here, the problem that I faced was how to protect the puppets for display, and at the same time not waste a lot of space for the strings! That is how this strange showcase came to be. To say that it is complicated would be an understatement! In it, the puppets stand on a makeshift stage. A spotlight casts their shadow on a curtain that has wrinkled, now, with age. It looked better in its early days. The stage floor is milk white Plexiglas, through which the lights that illuminate the row of Comic Nodders below, also shine above, to act as footlights. The puppets replicate their pose from the Americana page. Mickey and Minnie's necks are strange. They are just a piece of elastic. I see that they stretched over the years. Like everything in this collection, they are in need of Tender Loving Care.



Now, we move up to the second tier. The objects here, must be seen through a gentle rain of puppet strings. They include another pair of Mickey and Minnie, I can't resist these things! And three marionettes, Mickey Minnie and Pluto by Madam Alexander. There are also three tiny simple puppets made by Pelham. I got them at the J.L. Hudson Company, in Detroit, for about a dollar each, in 1959. That was 53 years ago. The years sure have a way of creeping up on you. I just realized that, because they were not made in the 1930s, I still think of them as "New".

Front and center on this tier, are a delicious pair of Steiff Mickey and Minnie. So pretty! The three dolls behind them are impressive, but elusive and offbeat. I have come to believe that the big one, in the middle, is the very rare Deluxe Velvet Knickerbocker that was only manufactured for one year. The Mickey, on the left, is one of those that George Borgfeldt came up with. And, that one, on the right, might be by Charlotte Clark. The age and look is right.



Now, at the risk of overkill and redundancy, let's see how these two tiers combine. My good friend Dewey Owens was always mystified by the fact that Mickey Minnie and Clarabelle cast a shadow on the curtain, even though, there was no spotlight, that he could detect, positioned in the room before them. This curious glitch in his, otherwise, superior intellect always amused me. I considered the lighting obvious, and not intended to deceive. Amazingly, either he was kidding me, or he really never solved the mystery.



The other puppet strings continue up, into a hidden space, all part of this complex case. And they are, in turn, hidden by a narrow showcase that is not deep, and runs along the top, in front of these. There are some curious treasures in it, worth explaining. In the center is a rare premium, the Mickey Mouse Ice-cream Theater. It was a giveaway, and very early. Mickey is shown holding a cone. The same cones are pictured on the proscenium. To the left against the back wall of the case is an actual steel mold used to manufacture these cones, with the raised image of Mickey on them. Also, here, is the first Post Toasties box to feature Mickey Mouse cut outs, and a set of those first cut outs, cut out.



To the right, are a pair of Dixon pencil boxes of Mickey and Minnie. Next to them, is a fabulous pictorial box for Mickey Mouse Undies. In the front row, are more Maw toothbrush holders. I could never get too many of those. There's, also, a German orchestra, slightly larger in size than a similar set, in the smaller black and white case. In each corner of the showcase, is a Mickey Mouse Jam jar. These jars, when empty, were intended to be used as banks. They are embossed with Disney characters, and have attractive slotted Mickey lids. Therefore, many of them were saved. But to find any, like these, with their graphically delicious labels, still there, is extraordinarily rare.



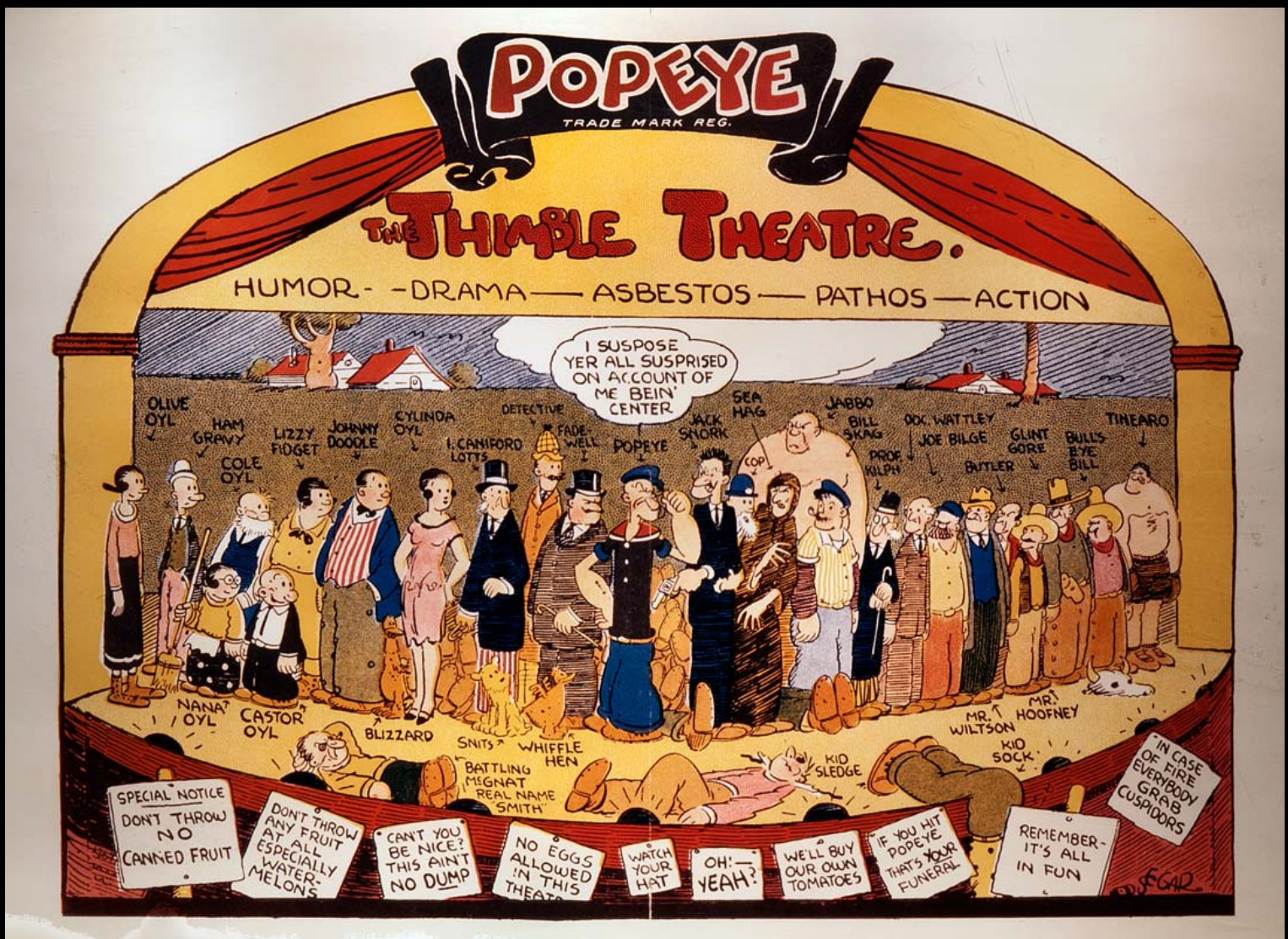
Now, let's step back and see how all three tiers go together to complete the total unit, and how it integrates into the Wall. This will reveal some cases that we haven't seen yet. But they are just a page or two away, so it won't matter, now.



POPEYE

In 1919, Elzie Segar created a comic strip called "Thimble Theater". It involved the day-to-day adventures of Olive Oyl, her boyfriend Ham Gravy, and her family, Olive's brother Castor Oyl, her Father Cole Oyl and her Mother Nana Oyl. Ten years later, in 1929, a Sailor, named, "Popeye" made a cameo appearance for a day, and never went away. Suddenly, he was the star attraction, and the strip took off.

Popeye became a star in the toy industry as well. He was first championed by the J. Chein Company, who introduced a comprehensive line of Popeye toys that might be considered the "Classics." The dynamic cover of the 1932 Chein catalogue really said it all. I could have owned this two page brochure for an ungodly price, but, at the time, I opted, instead, to have a large colored copy of the cover made, and framed. I can't beleive I am going to try to photograph it, and reduce it, to show it to you here. It depicts a stage with all the Thimble theater characters, lined up, ten years' worth of them, an impressive lot, with Popeye right in the middle of the line, audaciously exclaiming, "I suspose yer all susprised on account of me bein' center."



There is one oddball product that captures this moment in time. This Thimble Theater figure painting set. The box cover art was, obviously, "inspired" by the cover of the Chein brochure. Unlike a similar painting set, made by the same manufacturer, based on "Our Gang", the box never included a die cut theater, beyond the picture on the cover. Therefore, here it is, complete with everything, all the paints and the unpainted figures, most of whom, except for Olive Oyl and Popeye, never appeared as toy products again.

I painted the figures from a second set, which you see here. I took great care to try to replicate the delicacy of the German Comic Nodders, while, at the same time, remaining faithful to the colors on the box. This small showcase also contains a Popeye doll by the Paris Novelty Company, and is lined with an exciting cut out book of "Popeye Funny Films".



This is the point, at which Popey's career, as a future collectible, began. The earliest products of importance were those by Chein, and the repertoire of Chein Popeye products, for some collectors, became the building blocks, upon which a meritorious Popeye collection needed to be based. Getting these items in their original graphically interesting boxes became a goal that serious Popeye collectors strove to reach. It is a goal that, by the way, I never chased.

Popeye led several interrelated, but separate lives. As a Comic strip, he was one thing, reflected in the toys by Chein. And he was quite another entity as a Movie Star. The coming of the cartoons changed everything. The first Popeye cartoon captured a rare moment in time. There was a lot of historic precedent packed into those seven minutes. We were not only introduced to Popeye, but we heard his theme song, "Im Popeye the Sailor Man", in its entirety. This tune, beginning there, stuck with him, throughout his long career. The plot pattern for almost every Popeye cartoon to follow, six hundred of them, was set, right there, as well. It was simple: Bluto, attempts to molest Olive Oyl, Popeye tries to save her, in vain, eats spinach, beats the crap out of Bluto in... "The End!" The cartoon packed all this in, and also managed to squeeze in Betty Boop as well. It is on the list of "Banned Cartoons" on You Tube. Why, that would be is a mystery to me. Perhaps, the censors found Betty's topless hula dance too titillating! Curiously, even though, Mae Questel starred in the film as Betty Boop, she hadn't, yet, become the voice of Olive Oyl.

Now, Bluto became a subject of the toys as well. Popeye and Bluto fought on celluloid in the movies, and figures of them, made of celluloid, now fought as toys. The comic strip and the cartoons coexisted, each in their own parallel universe. Bluto appeared, only briefly, in one episode of the comic strip, but he became the co-star of almost every film. Wimpy was hardly ever seen on screen, but he became a major character, based on his popularity in the funny papers.

This showcase contains the heart of Mouse Heaven's Popeye collection. It's not as Heavenly as that of the Mouse! All the other Popeye cases in the house, and there are several, only exist to hold the things that couldn't fit in here. The content of this case grew, over the years, until it overflowed and spilled out everywhere. But, for the most part, my favorite Popeye things are here.



Starting, from the left to right, most of the Chein toys are represented. The Overhead Punching Bag, with the, somewhat scarce, Tin Drummer, standing on its canopy. Then, the regular Punching Bag, and, higher up, is the Chein Sparkler. Marx' Popeye and Olive, dancing on the Roof are tucked in there, somewhere. Next are 3 Chein dolls, two small, one large with an original box with art by Segar. Behind the taller Popeye, in the middle, is the Marx Popeye The Champ. The Chein Heavy Hitter is farther to the right. Along the back, are a series of dolls by Cameo that are a little later. They were created by Kallus too. Each is a beautifully articulated work of art! In the right corner, starting in the middle, is a small group of images that are of relative rarity.

In 1935, Chein lost the Popeye license to Louis Marx and Company, and the second wave of Popeye toys began. The Marx boxes were less refined than those by Chein. The difference in appearance in the package for the Chein doll, drawn by Segar, and Popeye The Champ from Marx, in the middle of the case, is a case in point. Looking down from here, we can see the Chein doll, circa 1932, It is strung with springs, rather than elastic, as is the smaller one, on the left. His box features art by Segar; not so, the Marx toys. In the very front, are several Popeye Razor blades, from Spain. We see also a Popeye Pocket Watch, and a colorful Harmonica, and to the right, are a pair of dolls that are among my favorite things.



Popeye and Olive Oyl, by the Paris Novelty Company. This is the only known example of Olive. How can I put this? The idea of any Popeye item being rare, is rare, because there seems to be an endless supply of everything, out there! I have come to believe that "only known examples" of Popeye things, are few and far between.



And, last of all, in the very corner. past the Hazels Marionettes, which are scarce enough, is what was my favorite Popeye thing for years, and still is, to some degree, the wood and composition jointed doll of Wimpy. I later deduced that it was made in Mexico.



Looking back on all the years, dollars, and precious time I spent on Popeye, one would never suspect that he was not a major thing for me. It's true that I once pursued him with, seemingly, the same appetite and intensity as I did Mickey. But I was really playing a different game, when it came to Popeye. Mickey and most of Disney was all about the LOOK to me. It was a purely visual thing. In the early days, I could safely advertise for Pie-cut Mickey, and have a reasonable expectation that whatever surprise arrived in the mail, sight unseen, stood a good chance of pleasing me aesthetically.



Popeye, and Donald Duck, each in their sailor suits, were playing in a different league. The essence of their appeal was not their looks, it was all about their personality. It is the subtle difference between "Art" and "illustration". One is about form and color, the other is more about telling a story. Nonetheless, Popeye was visually interesting, to some degree, as was early long billed Donald. Popeye was most exciting to me in the form of dolls created by my favorite toy artist, Joseph Kallus. He did some dolls for Chein, based on the Comic strip, and later, he designed dolls for his own company, Cameo. Each has a very different look, but both are great.



Here is a pleasant item I don't want to leave out. It is a delightful sketch of Popeye that Segar drew for a fan named, Bob Hamilton, on a genuine piece of King Features Syndicate stationery. The date is unknown, but the characters shown might offer some clue.



Now, we'll travel, down a few feet, to the last of the lower cases, on the Great Wall. Then we will head upstairs. This case contains a few dolls and a nice wood walking toy, as well as, two Fisher Price pull toys. The seated Popeye was the first Popeye toy they made. It might be, somewhat, rare. There is one toy here that has always said a lot to me about collecting Popeye. It is a totally surreal pull toy, a little late, and kinda cheesy, and the premise is ridiculous. If this thing was ever pulled along a sidewalk it would self-destruct in a few minutes, as it is intended to be dragged along, lying on its back. This impractical object was made by an improbable manufacturer, Line-Mar, better known for late Japanese tin windup toys. Paper on wood is out of character for them, to say the least.



The large central object in this case is hand made in the shape of a cross. It is a Popeye Carnival Game, in which one tries to toss a ball into the holes to win a prize. At the top, on the left side, is a rather primitive, but powerful Popeye mask. I got this from a costume supply in NYC, very early on. It caught my eye in their front window, as I was walking past. On the right, is the most complete Popeye kids costume I've ever seen. It has the hat and pipe, and most interesting, the tattooed lower arms! Moving down, we find an item that is slightly unsettling, the Popeye Flyswatter! It even comes with a cutout figure of Popeye swatting flies. What fun!



In the center of the showcase, is a large unusual Popeye doll, origin unknown; it's not homemade. There are several more Kallus designed Popeye dolls, hanging around. That strange square thing is the prototype for a toy I made called, "Tummy Ache", voted the worst toy of the year, in 1981. On the left, is the awesome Captain Marvel Doll. He was my favorite superhero, as a kid. Hoppy the Marvel Bunny peeks over his shoulder. Yes I know! He should be better displayed. This showcase illustrates the fact that I've run out of space. The cardboard jointed Popeye, holding a fan, is actually quite rare. There is a plaster Popeye thinker, and a jointed Jaymar Popeye, on its original card. To the right, is an elegant carnival figure of Wimpy, eating hamburgers, and an oilcloth Orphan Annie doll. Who knew she owned another dress? And along the bottom, is the complete set of King Features sirocco figures. I got them all in one fell swoop, the happy result of one of my earliest attempts to sneak into a show. Oh, how could I overlook the Dopey ventriloquist doll, the dumbest toy I know? With it, a kid could master the art of ventriloquism instantly, due to the fact that Dopey doesn't speak.

OK! There is one more Popeye case to go. This stuff will look familiar to anyone who has ever collected Popeye. But there are a few "fresh" items. I'll point them out. In the background, is the rarer of the three Popeye tin lithographed games. Many a "Bubble Target" and "Popeye Menu" met my eyes, before I ever laid them on this "Popeye Ring Toss." Then, there's a Popeye sailboat, and another flyswatter, and, in the center, an ugly Popeye doll by Deans, and the largest Popeye Celluloid I've seen. It's standing, behind a 16 page comic, called, "Coozing Around the World with Popeye" I have no idea what "coozing" means. In front of that, a Spanish Popeye plays an accordion.





Let's look at this, from another angle. If one sinks low enough, everything looks monumental. One can pick out the cast iron door stop, some plaster carnival prizes' and some interesting cutouts, on the far wall.



From the other side, one sees three small cast iron figures, a Popeye battery operated toy, the only one I own, and the rather rare Popeye Puppet Show. The silver statue, in the center, is a corkscrew, and next to it, is a folk art Popeye in a barrel.



Last but not least, I'm moving in on another favorite, another Popeye doll by Paris Novelty, but this time, while Olive Oyl is still downstairs, Popeye is out with Betty Boop. Oh, by the way, check out that fan that Betty's holding, Is that Mickey Mouse I see?



With one more look at these refreshingly fresh images, we'll bid this showcase, goodbye, and take a look around the house. There are a few more Popeyes, to be seen!



On the platform by the chimney, is an interesting pair of Popeye figures. Both of them are walking toys. The large one, sitting down, was homemade. It is a rather inspired piece of folk art, carved of wood, with clothing that is all original. A rod in Popeye's back controls the walking motion. The smaller folk art Mickey, next to him, is based on the same principle. The other walking Popeye doll is European. Its concept and construction is complex and interesting. It's made from a variety of materials: wood, composition, and, inside, there is some intricate machinery. Aided by a helping hand, he toddles along, balancing precariously, not unlike a baby, taking its first steps. His arms and head are animated, as well. Europe brought some interesting Popeye items into the collection, but, unlike Mickey, not that many. Here too, is a pair of Popeye and Olive dolls, carefully crocheted, and permanently attached to their base. They were also made in Europe, where handwork, like this, was often considered "manufacturing".



Here are two items, pictured together, simply because they are both tall and thin. On the left, is an oddity that I only encountered one time, in 40 years. Because of its unusual size, I have to believe it might be as rare, as it is unwieldy. This is a punch-out book, in which the front and back cover, themselves, oversized, combine to create a Popeye paper doll, three feet high! On the right, is an elegant folk art whirligig. It is difficult to date this piece. But the bottom of the base displays the evidence of many years, outdoors, rotating in the wind.



This weathervane is an unlikely pairing of characters from two different strips, Segar's Popeye and "Major Hoople," from "Our Boarding House" by Gene Ahern. They meet to saw wood together, in this exquisite animated folk art weathervane. Its rich and radiant patina glows with the inimitable aura of age, and tells a tale of countless years, outdoors, in every kind of weather.

I can't believe I hesitated to acquire this treasure. One Friday at Brimfield, I circled it all day, trying to overcome an aversion to its asking price. Could I afford it? Could I afford to live without it? I couldn't decide, and didn't, in fact, make up my mind, until I went back, one last time, and it was gone! There's nothing like missing an item, due to your own hesitation, to make you wish that you had bought it! I sheepishly asked the dealer about it. He had merely started packing up and put it away. Yes, Oh, yes, it was still available! Now it sits, in the middle of the coffee table, where I enjoy it, every day.



Will we ever finish this page? One thing leads to another. Speaking of Major Hoople, he makes one other appearance in Mouse Heaven, in the form of this mysterious ashtray. Was this object manufactured, or was it home made? The cast metal figure, with its intricately tooled brass mechanism, and a custom made glass stopper, leaves little doubt that it must have been the former. On the other hand, the subject matter, and the limited possibilities for retailing an object of this nature, in an almost Victorian era, suggests that it should have been, the latter.

To operate this appliance, one must, first, prepare it, by removing the glass stopper. Then fill Major Hoople's body with water. Now he's ready! When it's time to extinguish a burning cigarette, one need only place it in the ashtray. Then, press the lever on Major Hoople's back, and a hidden faucet suddenly appears. When fully extended, it automatically emits a stream of water to dramatically douse the flame.

Another folk art object that is related to both Popeye and the putting out fires, is this huge handsome glass goblet. It was apparently created as a tribute to the "Reading Hose and Fire Company". Painted on the exterior we see many of our favorite Comic Characters, Popeye and Olive, Jiggs and Maggie, etc. When viewed from the inside, we encounter the same characters, unencumbered by their clothing.



Here, at last, we get to the final Popeye Item, one that seems to impress everyone, this spectacular display for Popeye Sunshine Cookies. Popeye is die cut from heavy cardboard. On his shoulders, he balances a plank. Hanging from this, are six colorful boxes of Popeye Sunshine Biscuits, each one with a different set of images. Everything about this object is original and complete, including the cookies. Each box was full of hundreds of broken pieces, all of the original cookies. Every single crumb was there! They just needed to be reassembled. Would you believe I solved this monumental jigsaw puzzle, using "Crazy Glue?" The cookies continue behind the base of the display, adding up to 26, in all, each different. They portray all the Thimble Theater Characters, from "Alice the Goon" to "Wimpy!" Now, each one is absolutely "Perfik!" And I have become an aficionado on "How the Cookie Crumbles!"



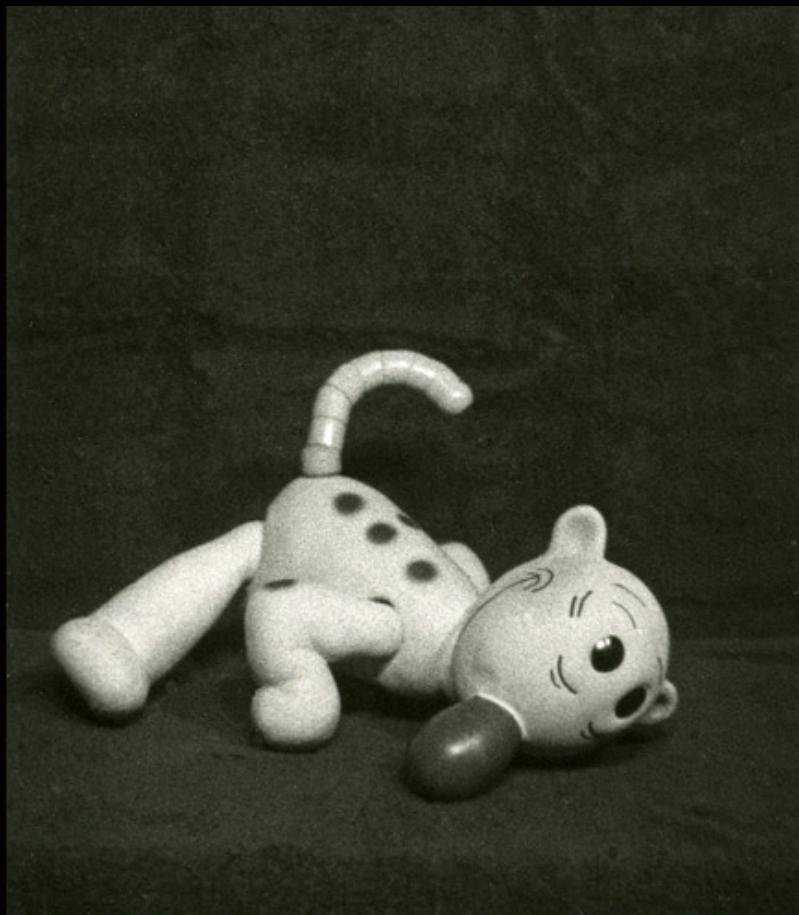
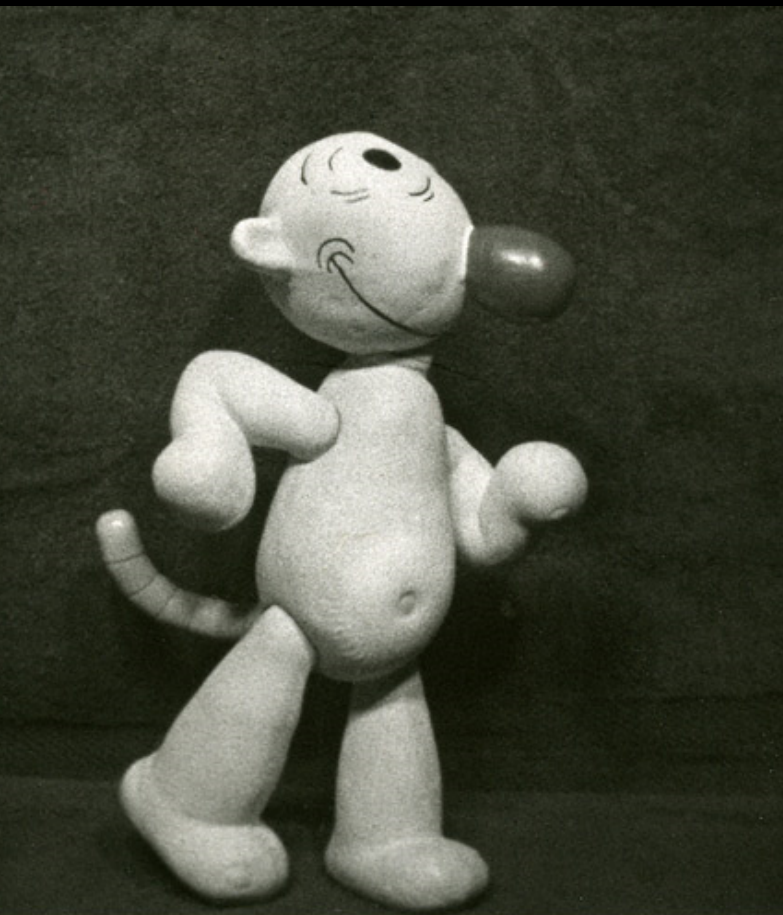
POPEYE'S JEEP

This little group of photographs have appeared and disappeared, on and off, throughout the years, sort of like the Jeep, himself, who can become invisible, at will. I rediscovered them, quite by accident, tucked between the pages of a book, a couple of weeks ago. But the thought did not occur to me, until today, to include them here. They represent the first toy I ever restored. The year must have been 1949. I was about 12, at the time, and found this doll among the stuff that my father used to hide.

Beginning when I was four, at Christmas time, he'd buy box lots of toys from "Good Will". It wasn't because we were poor; it's just that a bargain was something he adored. I used to say, my father's name, should have been "I Can Get It For You Wholesale Sam". The more presentable items would appear, under the Christmas tree. Those that were in a state of ill repair, or incomplete, he'd hide. Like me, he couldn't stand to throw anything away.

Months after Christmas, I'd find the stuff I didn't get. This Jeep, above, was one of those that didn't make the cut. But, I found him, and, although, I had no idea who he was, I liked him, ... a lot. I guess, things haven't changed much! So, I repainted him with my airbrush, a precocious thing for a kid my age, or a kid of any age, to have, back then. And, later on, I posed him on the staircase, and took these photographs. There were more of them; only these four have survived. The doll, itself, happened to be one of those things, dear to me, my mother enjoyed throwing away.

I guess this episode accounts for why I love the Jeep. Thank you Dr. Dell. Is our 45 minutes up, yet? Ten minutes left? Then I'll continue:





Seriously, in terms of pure geometry, the Jeep is right up there with Mickey. Like Mickey Mouse, he is made up of simple basic shapes that put together right, as in this case, convey the message that he is a living entity. What kind of animal is he? Beats me! The distant cousin of a puppy? A predecessor to E.T? Supposedly, he had mystical powers that enabled him to tell fortunes, answer questions, and predict the future. If his tail stood erect, the answer was, always, yes! That's why they called him "The Lucky Jeep" .

Here is the only Jeep showcase in Mouse Heaven, Popeye in his rowboat, awash in a sea of Jeeps. On the back wall, is the Segar Sunday page that introduced him. His image brilliantly fills the page! What a spectacular introduction! The objects in this showcase pretty much represent most of all the known Jeep variations, with the exception of a large doll by Dean, which was offered to me, first, at a price that was obscene.

After I turned it down, the dealer, the late Richard Wright, asked the next potential buyer half that price, an amount that I would have gladly paid, in a heartbeat. That illustrates one of the shortcomings of being me. If dealers show you the great stuff first, there is a price to pay. If you turn it down, the next guy often gets a break.



The wood and composition dolls, throughout the case, are, once again, the work of Joseph Kallus. There are two velvet dolls by Dean. The spots on these happen to be four leaf clovers. This was a British touch. The Jeep was purported to bring good luck. There is a cardboard "Answer Jeep", and another interesting doll, of origin, unknown. And, by the rudder of the rowboat, is a rubber Jeep, who, like all the toys that were made of rubber, is destined to be here, only, temporarily. The rowboat, by the way, is one of the more desirable Popeye toys. The action is very realistic, and the motor is a serious piece of machinery. One winding will power it across a lake.

Now, out to the hall! In this lower corner case, are the two tall tin games, the Popeye Menu bagatelle and the Bubble Target, and there is an equally tall felt Popeye doll, and a smaller, but interesting, doll of Wimpy. Here too, is the boxed Jaymar set that constructed the Popeye family, made up of wooden beads. This set also included the Jeep.



I have one more Jeep, and it is, possibly, the most unusual. It is just a plaster carnival prize, but it is an excellent image of the Jeep, the best in plaster that I've seen. Most of the others are grotesque. I've never seen one half as nice as this. It sits on my desk, along with a little group of special things, basking in the warm friendly light of this folk art Popeye lamp, which is something I love, every bit as much, as I dislike the pot metal ones. I keep them hidden away, and have placed the nicer of their two different shades on this wooden lamp that was homemade. This shade is stunning, by the way. The panorama that travels around it was actually created for it by Segar, himself. Here too, is another of those plaster Wimpys, eating hamburgers.



CHARLIE CHAPLIN

One thing I always found fascinating about Charlie Chaplin was how with the simplest of means, a bowler hat, a cane, big shoes, baggy pants, and a small greasepaint mustache, he transformed himself into a Comic Character. And thus, Chaplin became “The Little Tramp” an iconic image of such power that it could withstand a thousand variations of representation, from realistic to abstract, and still maintain its instantly recognizable identity.

And the images poured forth, in toys, dolls, games, figurines, and novelties from every country. Charlie was immensely popular in England, France, Spain, Italy and Germany. And they all created great Chaplin merchandise. The hat, the cane, the mustache, was all it took to render an acceptable likeness of “The Tramp” or “Charlot,” as he was known in France. Almost all the Charlie Chaplin items I’ve amassed were manufactured overseas. Many of them were intended for that market only. I never collected Chaplin avidly. Nonetheless, many great images came my way, and most of them ended up in this single case.



And the favorites, size permitting, settled in the center. The one that I like best is the tin Squeeze toy in the middle. Here Charlie is totally stylized. He has become a full-fledged Comic Character. When the lever behind him is squeezed, he does an uncharacteristic jumping jack motion. His eyes open. The toy is in slightly rough condition. I saw no need to touch it up. He told me he was happy as he was.

Just as Charlie had a handful of recognizable and unmistakable visual traits, he also had a repertoire of signature “moves” that he did, time and again. And all of them lent themselves to being easily reproduced in windup toys. So, every windup toy one saw would, most likely, do one of the following things: walk the Charlie Chaplin walk, tip his hat, or twirl his cane! The Most characteristic Chaplin toy, and also the most realistic is the windup to the right, it is very naturalistic in form, and captures his signature walk. The second most prevalent Charlie windup toy is the felt covered one by Schuco at the far right end of the case. He twirls his cane. One curiosity that takes center stage, is “Mathews’ Palace of mirth and Merriment”. This is a toy theater that features Charlie Chaplin. Although, it was made in England, judging by the stars and stripes emblem above the stage, it was aiming for the American market. What is interesting, here, apart from its pleasant appearance, is the fact that among the cast of generic characters, all of whom are in full color, Charlie Chaplin, alone, is rendered in Black and White. Once again, as in early Mickey, black and white signifies that he is in “the movies”.



Among these up front items are two tin figures; one tips his hat, the other operates some sort of yoyo! In the middle, is a hat tipping statue made of pot metal, that also cleverly twirls his cane. Here, too, a little hard to see, is a beautifully sculpted silver salt shaker. To the far right, is a bell ringing toy that tips his hat, while speaking on the latest of modern telephones. The cylinder before him is a highly stylized perfume bottle, and next to that is just his head, which is a pencil sharpener. On the left, are two tin toys; one dances on a platform, the other bangs a symbol, while holding a cat?



On the far left of the case, is a small collection of Harold Lloyd items. Marx made a large walking figure that, although, unlicensed, was intended to be mistaken for Harold Lloyd. Once a common toy, I haven't seen one in years, including my own, which is buried in a solid cube of windup toys that stands in the corner of the room, and has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared. Here too are 100 Charlie Chaplin razor blades. Not as strange, perhaps, as the fact that there were Mickey Mouse and Popeye razor blades, as well. Comic Characters weren't just for the little shavers.



The objects below run the gamut, from realistic, as in the the large Royal Dalton mug, and a Swiss ball jointed figure by Bucherer, looking rather glum, to the abstract, such as the windup clown that, if not for the twirling cane and mustache, might not be recognized as Chaplin. Moving into the surreal, we see Charlie sitting down with bare Charlie Chaplin feet, identifiable by a face and small mustache, on each.



Charlot is gratuitously included in this French horse race game. His cane becomes the marker that decides the race. He is not mentioned on the box.



Here is a curious object. Apparently it is some kind of target. It has been adapted, rather elaborately, from the back panel of a game that is also included in the showcase above. The mechanism is quite complex and professional. The cigarette shaped switch that turns on Charlie's eyes is made of brass. When the cigarette is pressed, Charlie's eyes light up. The cigarette must be pulled out to turn them off again. This adaptation was all done by hand, a long time ago.



This Whitman Punch-out book was published in 1931, "Movie Masks of Ten Famous Comedy Stars," headed up by Charlie Chaplin. The book contains the once familiar faces of ten stars who became "famous," in Silent movie days. The cover illustrates how little it takes to capture an image, recognizable as Charlie Chaplin.



The single most extraordinary Chaplin item in the collection is this fabulous carved figure from a Belgian carousel. It is one of those objects that needs no argument or explanation to qualify as a work of art. Across the room is a figure of Popeye that was, quite possibly, from the same carousel, and made by the same carver. One can't help wondering what other characters were represented there. Because these figures were carved by hand, they are, essentially, one of a kind. Both have one other thing in common, their expression is a little bit sardonic. Although, Charlie appears rather charming and debonair, at the same time, he is also somewhat sinister. These figures have a mind of their own, an inner life.







There are several more Chaplin icons in a group showcase upstairs, along with the images of other personalities who appeared on the radio and in the movies. They all have one thing in common, a persona so unique that it became iconic. I will take you up there now, and call the next page “Hollywood”.

HOLLYWOOD

This is going to be a catch all category, and one hard to define. Stars, today, are celebrated for their versatility, how many different characters they can portray. But in the early days of Hollywood the actors, themselves, were, more or less, the characters. Their physical identities were often so strong and visual that they lent themselves to stylization and caricature. And products bearing their likenesses were instantly recognizable and popular. Certain personalities, when they actually appeared on the silver screen, always played themselves. These star's physical characteristics, whether real, think Laurel and Hardy, or self-created i.e. Charlie Chaplin, were so distinctive that they became iconic.

Moving upstairs, the Charlie Chaplin showcase that was begun downstairs continues up here, where Charlie is joined by other luminaries from that fabled land of dreams that a star struck nation knew as Hollywood. One star, who once shone brightly and has now sunk below the horizon of memory, is Eddie Cantor. Not only did he become a doll, admittedly a rare one, in his heyday, he was so popular that an enormous air-filled effigy of him became the lead balloon in the 1934 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Another unlikely subject for a doll is W.C. Fields. He became, not just an ordinary doll, but a ventriloquist dummy. This was an offshoot of the enormous popularity of the Charlie McCarthy show, where Charlie and W.C. bantered in a weekly battle of wits. This doll is amazing! From his hat to his stickpin and his spats, and the original pin back button on his lapel, he is totally complete.



My Charlie McCarthy doll is a prisoner in an inaccessible showcase downstairs. I'll try to snap a picture of him and include it here. Wow! That is surprising. That photo is so much more pleasing than I ever thought was possible under such adverse conditions. Eunice gave me that doll for Christmas in 1962. I feel like I am seeing him for the first time in 50 years. Well, in many ways, I am.

Meanwhile, he is not to be confused with the other Charlie, who dominates this showcase as he did the one downstairs. There is more Charlie Chaplin stuff here. The toy theater from downstairs, reappears in a bigger more spectacular version, one, in which Charlie is, this time, in color. The larger animated puppet of him, in the middle, is from England, and below that we see a kind of Charlie push toy, in which his feet repeat on a wheel to create the illusion that he is running, or walking, depending on the speed. Along the bottom of the case, is a group of

items that relate to Amos and Andy, wooden dolls, tin sparklers, and a delicate pair of German bisque figurines along with their puppy. A sparkler of Harold Lloyd is here as well. There is also a pair of Laurel and Hardy salt and pepper shakers, and a Charlie McCarthy clock.



On the left, above, we discover a delightful doll of Jackie Coogan as “The Kid” the 1921 film that made a star of him. In my exuberant early days as a collector, a friend talked me into entering him in a doll show, where he won a blue ribbon that has, now, faded to purple. And behind this rare doll, is Shirley Temple, a doll that was so complete, in her original box, with all her paraphernalia, that I simply could not resist her.

I remember the day that I first met her, at the Old Madison Square Garden, in 1963. She loudly spoke to me. Did I say spoke? Make that hollered, screamed, and begged, pleading to go home with me! It was really kind of crazy. What was I, a grown man doing purchasing a Shirley Temple doll? Ah, but she was extraordinary, in breathtaking condition, and utterly complete, with every imaginable accessory, and in her original box, with her picture on the label. Her hair was pristine with every well permed curl in place, and she wore her original dress, with every pleat, perfectly pressed. Her hands were affixed to the hem of her dress with blue ribbons in her signature curtsy. This was her point of purchase presentation pose, and the bows had never been untied. There were other clothes as well, her straw hat, a second polka dotted dress, on an official Shirley Temple hanger. She also had a Shirley Temple purse with a Shirley Temple Mirror and a Shirley Temple broach, and her original pin back button. And as if all of that was not enough, there was, also, an autographed photo. What a stunning presentation! How could I resist this miracle, all for \$35. She proudly stands, today, the only doll, among a multitude of Comic Characters. Her 80 years of age show just a little, in the form of a few cracks that have appeared on her face, and her glass eyes have slightly clouded over, but she still Radiates. And she still speaks to me as clearly as the day that we first met .

Shirley Temple was irresistible in the movies too. No matter what role she was cast in, from “Heidi” to a “Poor Little Rich Girl”, she always played herself. As a licensed property she brightened the lives of more young ladies than any child star in history. And many a little girl, growing up in the 1930s, had to endure their hair in curlers, as their star struck mothers dreamed of their own daughters being just like Shirley. As our friend Ken Anger pointed out : There were a hundred thousand child star wannabes in Hollywood, and many of them were talented, but only one could be Shirley Temple.



Also, irresistible to me, was this somewhat haunting bust of Shirley. It dwells in that elusive land where beauty might, or might not, be discovered, hovering halfway between hideous and pretty. This image changes subtly, from exuberant youth to middle age, depending on the lighting, or the time of day. She is tinted, ever so slightly, with highlights of iridescent blue.



Less elusive, is the radiance of this irrepressibly upbeat image of happy go lucky optimistic iconic Shirley, who, throughout the bleak years of the Great Depression, urged an ailing Nation to “Keep Smiling!”



Moving down to the shelf below, we come to a group of dolls that were created by a doll artist, Mary Green. They were made to order, exclusively to please her patron, Daniel Blum. Daniel Blum was an author and popular historian, who, every year, produced a pair of books chronicling the Movies and the Theater for the previous year. His compilation of the History of the Movies was treasured by me, as a kid, solely because the tiny black and white photos that represented each movie were the only place one could see an actual image from a Disney film. Even then, I was keenly aware of the difference between the candy coated illustrations in Little Golden Books and the “real thing”. My copy of his Movie Anthology fell open to the pages with Snow White, Pinocchio, and Fantasia, automatically.

Mary Green spent all her life making these dolls. Each was unique and custom made, from scratch. The bodies were fully rounded, fabricated from fabric, and beautifully dressed. Each authentically portrayed a famous star of stage or screen, usually in their most famous role, at Daniel Blum’s request. One element that made these dolls unique was the fact that their faces were completely flat! On these small oval canvases, Mary, as a portrait miniaturist, painted a perfect likeness of the star. The effect was haunting, even stunning, when seen from exactly the right angle, and under perfect lighting. When viewed from any other angle, the illusion fell apart. Perhaps that was also true of the very people they portrayed, when not seen through the camera’s eye or the proscenium of a stage.



On September 18th, I know the day, for it happened to be my birthday. I can't recall the year, other than to say it was the mid 60's. We were living in the old loft, then, and we had no money. Eunice and I were walking along the street, a few blocks from where we lived, when we noticed a small sign on the door of a rather austere building, some sort of theater society. It simply said "Auction Today." We entered, out of curiosity, and there they were, table after table of dolls, some 485 of them, Mary Green's entire life's endeavor, property of the late Daniel Blum.

We were told that he had willed the entire collection to the Museum of the City of New York, provided they displayed it. They would accept the dolls, but not that stipulation. So here they were at auction! And the auction was about to begin! Eunice and I were swept away, caught up in the excitement. Obviously, with no money, our choices were limited. What category to go for? Comedians, were one possibility, but we settled on Divas, and threw all caution to the wind. The auction was actually heartbreaking. A roadside tourist trap, along a Florida highway, had put in a standing bid of \$5 each for any doll that didn't go for more. They got the lion's share, all of those that were obscure to the crowd of bidders who were there. God, there were so many that we wanted! Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire were amazing, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi in their most famous roles, and all the great comedians, W.C. Fields was oh so tempting, but we exercised self-control, and we got the ones we wanted, Mae West, Theda Berra, Marlene Dietrich, Shirley Temple, Sonia Henie, Sarah Bernhardt, and for good measure, Elvis Presley.

For all of these, I did something I had never done before or since, wrote a check, without any money in the bank. The sum was \$185. Fate had brought us to this auction, blindsided us, as we innocently walked by. Now Fate provided our salvation, for in the mail, later that day we discovered a birthday present from my mother, a check that was just enough.

In the wall in Manhattan, I built a showcase lined with mirrored tiles. In the top were holes, positioned above each carefully placed figure. A light was installed, above each hole, with a colored gelatin, over each bulb, so each doll was lit by a different colored light. This blurry photo of Marlene is all I have. The showcase moved to the country with us. It's still stored under the floor. I never set it up. Thus, all the dolls are stuffed into one insignificant showcase with other stuff. And yesterday, thinking about Charlie McCarthy, I don't think about him a lot, I realized I haven't seen his radio for years. I discovered that some of Mary Green's dolls are sitting on it!

One radio that you can see, is the Dionne Quintuplets Radio, in the front of the case, along with a potpourri of other things that include Mortimer Snerd and Fanny Brice, and some oddball Charlie McCarthy items, and even a walking eyeball, ridden by a troll, and a crawling dismembered hand, two toys that I made, years ago. These are not prototypes, for a change, they were actually manufactured. Donald Duck says, "What The quack!"





Along the top of the cabinet, below, is a collection of "Hollywood Mugs" by "Barclay". I bet these were popular and plentiful, in the 1940s. They are quite rare, today. The first I ever saw was W.C Fields, from the film "Poppy." The handle was a croquet mallet. This was at the first Brimfield. It was at the end of the day, and I was out of money! I stopped myself from spending the \$30 it would take. I never saw that mug again. I later passed up Kathryn Hepburn and Ronald Coleman at Stormville. Finally, I saw nearly all of those below as a group, at a much later Brimfield, and took the leap. I have never had another opportunity to find, or see, the few that I passed up. Hindsight is 20-20. Who knew what would be turn out to be rare, or prove to be commonplace in those early days? Do I need to identify the Characters? From left to right, is Jerry Colona, Barry Fitzgerald, Pat O'Brian, Bette Davis, Jimmy Durante, his schnozzle is the handle, which reminds me I have a game of that name that is really quite amusing. Then comes Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Joan Crawford, with her golden Oscar, and Frank Sinatra, with a bobby-soxer. I really like these a lot, and wish that I had more.



The shelf, below the mugs, is filled with something I find extraordinary. I remember playing with a set of these, when I was five. The man who created this foray into self-absorbed intensity was totally immersed in a world all his own. They are all part of a toy, called "Puppet Parade", which according to the box, was "The Most Fascinating And Beautiful Toy in Existence." These were sold in the early 1940s, all together, in a large colorful box. The individual elements were also sold separately in decorative envelopes, at 10 cents each. And I recently discovered a deluxe set, complete with an elaborate cardboard theater to house the individual scenes.

Here is the World of Vaudeville, complete in one box. Each unit, of which there are five, is its own self-contained stage. The construction and operation of these puppets is totally unique. They assemble with small paper tabs and then the figures are mounted on a string that extends, behind them, to attach to the back of the stage, and forward to the viewer/operator's hand. That person is intended to sit in front of the scene, and wiggle the string. Thus, the puppeteer and the "audience" are one in the same!

PUPPET PARADE

THE MOST FASCINATING AND BEAUTIFUL TOY IN EXISTENCE



12 Great Acts!

NO CUTTING • NO PASTING • EASY TO ASSEMBLE! EASY TO OPERATE • ONLY ONE STRING FOR EACH PUPPET! BEAUTIFUL BACKGROUNDS FOR EACH ACT! EASY AND RAPID CHANGE OF ACTS! CHARACTERS SING, DANCE, GESTICULATE, EMOTE—TERRIFIC FUN FOR EVERYONE! COMPLETE INSTRUCTIONS FOR ASSEMBLY AND OPERATION!

Red Toy • PAPER PRODUCTS DIVISION • ELECTRIC CORPORATION OF AMERICA • COPYRIGHT E. C. A. 1943

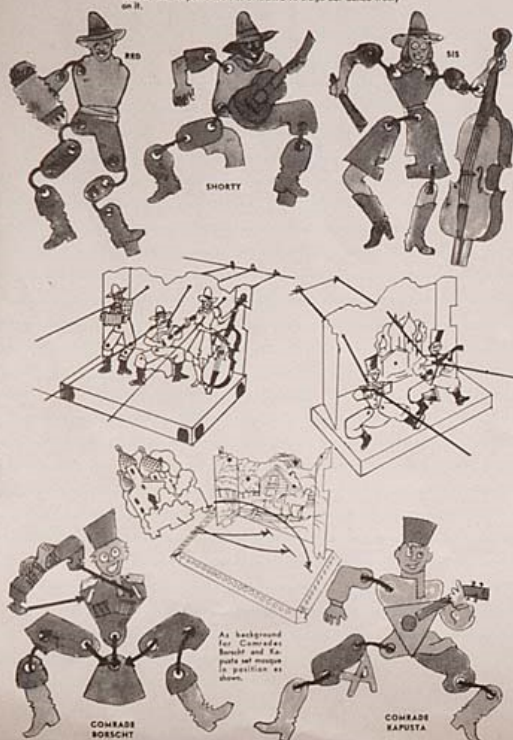
25 Characters

WITH GORGEOUS SETTINGS

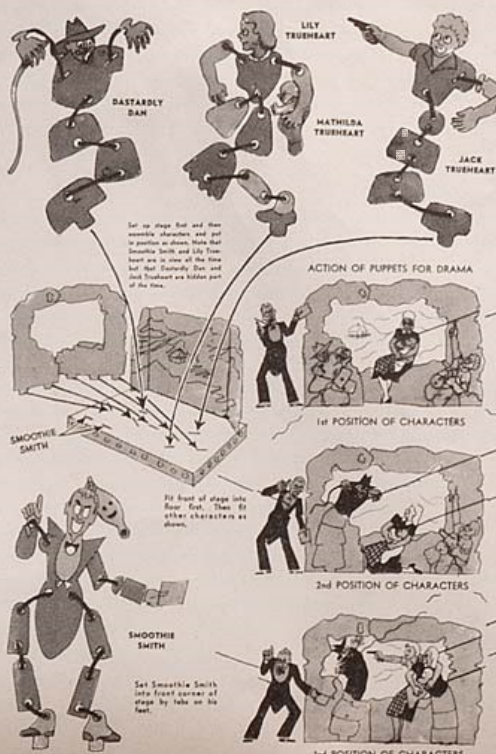
Is it complicated? Is it insane? Take a look at the instruction sheet!

The Terrific Trio, Comrades Borscht and Kapusta

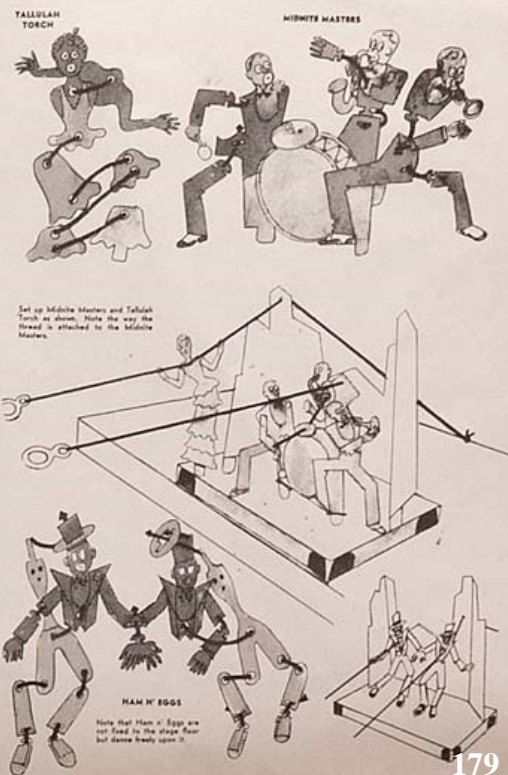
Red and Shorty are attached to the stage by tabs on their boots. Attach Sis to stage by tab in bottom of bass fiddle. Comrades Borscht and Kapusta are not attached to stage but dance freely on it.

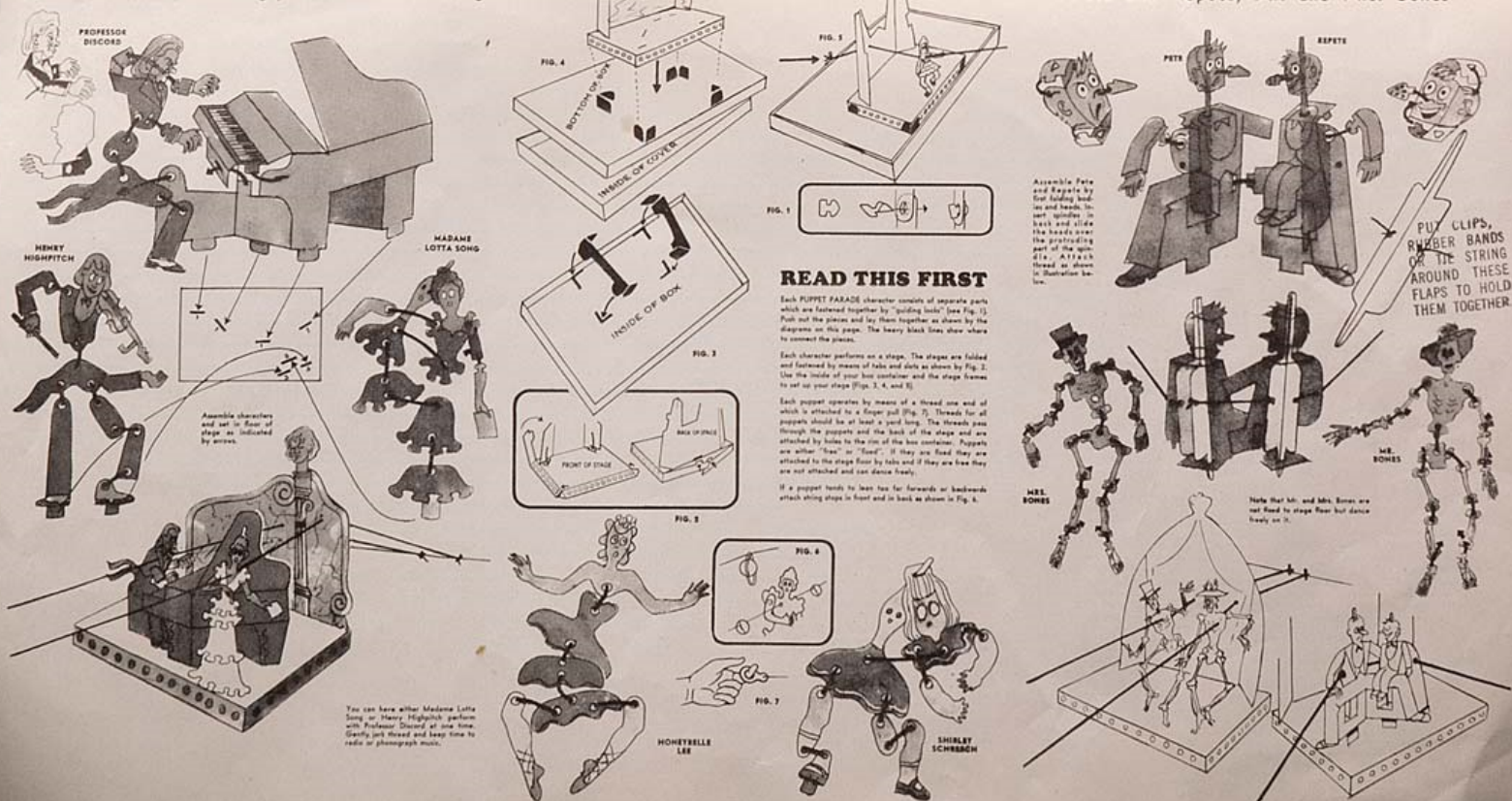


Smoothie Smith, the Great Drama (THRILLS AND CHILLS)



Midnight Masters, Tallulah Torch, Ham'n Eggs





Each "act" comes with a long introduction, wildly irrelevant. The stories that the man who created this thing wrote rise to the level of obsession. Some are several thousand words. Shirley Screech is one of the shorter ones. It is a convoluted tale of how her inappropriate behavior offends everybody, and in the end, gets her father fired. Her parents are beside themselves, trying to figure out what to do with Shirley. Then they read about Puppet Parade and find out she can be obnoxious, there, and get money for it. The final line reads: "We give you the girl that just loves to show off, smart and sassy - Miss Shirley Screech!"

PUPPET PARADE

presents **2** Gorgeous, Glamorous, Scintillating Stars in **FUNTIME MATINEE**

Honey Belle Lee

A sensation of the South, the brightest star of Broadway, the toast of the theatre... **HONEY BELLE LEE!** This young, lovely and marvelous ballet dancer will move you to enthusiastic applause over and over again. Watch her toe dance—see the superb rhythm of her every movement—notice how beautifully she uses her arms and hands and with what subtle grace she gestures with her head.

You too will agree that Honey Belle Lee is the "Dancing Darling" of the stage....

Shirley Screech

She is an adorable kid with big blue eyes and beautiful golden hair. She SINGS and DANCES and RECITES with the charm and exquisite ease of a polished actress. But she is still a little girl who loves her doll more than all the fame she possesses, and appreciates an ice cream soda better than the most favorable press notice.

Only a minute after you meet her, **SHIRLEY SCREECH** will have won your heart forever.

PAPER PRODUCTS DIVISION • ELECTRIC CORP. OF AMERICA • COPYRIGHT E. C. A. 1943 *A Reed Toy*

"Miss Shirley Screech!" is obviously a parody of Shirley Temple. The creator of the set writes about all 25 of the characters, voluminously and passionately. But he really takes off on little Shirley Screech. Clearly he dislikes her. Consequently, I am inclined to believe there might have been some reaction. Maybe even legal action. For this figure is very rare. I have encountered any number of complete sets, over the years, some with the original factory wrapper, intact and sealed, and she is not included. Either she was removed at the factory, or, perhaps, never put in. She is still pictured and mentioned on the box, but is rarely found inside. I was only able to find her, along with her friend Honey Belle Lee, in this separate product, an offshoot of the bigger set.

Here is “Schnozzle” the game I mentioned earlier. I didn’t intend to include it here, but it is rather interesting. Clearly, it is based on Jimmy Durante. There is a vague likeness of him on the box, and the words “Ha Cha Cha!” No mention of his name. The interior is even more strange, with the shadow of his profile printed on the insert, and looming over the bizarre object, inside. This is a really sneaky, but somewhat creative way to get away, without paying for a license.



Here is another extraordinary object that I could not resist, this fabulous candy container of Maurice Chevalier. His head comes off to fill his body with candy. His hat is straw, made exactly like a real one, in miniature. This delicate portrait captures his personality, with uncanny sensitivity, from the moisture on his lip to the twinkle in his eye, this image is alive.



The Disney studios also tried their hand at caricaturing the stars, first in "Mickey's Gala Premier", and later in this Technicolor extravaganza, "Mother Goose Goes Hollywood." It was one of the final Silly Symphonies. The Caricatures were exceedingly well done. This poster captures them nicely. It is, in itself, a classic. The film was nominated for an Academy Award in 1938, but the Award was won by Disney's "Ferdinand."

Walt Disney's
MOTHER GOOSE
GOES HOLLYWOOD



R.K.O. RADIO PICTURE IN TECHNICOLOR

And, last of all, is an object that is part Art, and part Archeology. This fantastic fragment of an ancient artifact was a gift from Kenneth Anger. It is the best two thirds of an unknown three sheet poster for "The Hollywood Party." The missing section contained the "ood" in Hollywood and what appears to be Jimmy Durante, and, who knows, who else? Nobody does, as far as I can tell. This fragment is all that remains.





BUCK ROGERS

The virtues of Buck Rogers always eluded me. The toys were few, and often visually uninteresting. The artwork in the comic strip was wildly inconsistent, sometimes dreadful, sometimes great! As a collectible, some of my sometimes friends and competitors were really into him. I was glad to see their attention diverted elsewhere, and not focused on the rich visual legacy of Mickey. And yet, in spite of my lack of enthusiasm for Buck, the character, I noticed that a few of the products the Buck Rogers license generated were visually Amazing! And thus, without becoming an impassioned Buck Rogers fan, I, nonetheless, acquired some carefully selected Buck Rogers items, when they, conveniently, came my way.

Looking Buck up on Google, just now, I think I solved some of the mystery of why Buck Rogers artwork seemed so inconsistent to me at the time. I always associated Buck Rogers with the name Dick Calkins; most people did. Some of "his" art was really bad. I just discovered that Calkins was a hired hand, not the originator of the strip, as most comic strip artists are. The premise was actually adapted from a story, "Armageddon 2419" that appeared in Amazing Stories Magazine in 1929. Philip Nowlan and the John F. Dille Company hired Dick Calkins to draw a daily strip. Nolan adapted the first story. The following year, a Sunday strip was added, and another artist, Russell Keaton, was hired to draw that. He was replaced by Rick Yager in 1932. The name Dick Calkins continued to appear, long after he was no longer involved. So that explains why the guy who drew Buck Rogers, who I assumed to be Dick Calkins appeared to have good days and bad!

I always suspected that Dick Calkins might have had nothing to do with the wild colorful graphics that graced the occasional Buck Rogers product that, in its visual awesomeness, overcame my lack of enthusiasm for Buck, in general. The thought often occurred to me that the few Buck Rogers products that excited me might have been the work of none of the above, but rather someone in a position, like mine, working for the company that produced the merchandise.

By far, the most delicious manifestation of Buck's hit and miss greatness can be seen in this visual extravaganza, "The Buck Rogers Cut Out Adventure Book." This vibrant splash of color, the ultimate premium, was actually given away free, to any kid who could testify, and get their parents to verify that he or she had consumed a glass of "Cocomalt", each day for a month! There was a complex document that had to be filled out and signed. Then, after several weeks of waiting, and eager anticipation, this is what arrived:



Is this Fabulous! or What! And, by the way, the kid who cut this out (it wasn't me) did an amazing job!

I've seen this item come up, several times, in auctions, and referred to as "Mint and Uncut". Some even go so far as to add the word "Complete". By complete they mean the book, itself. Some of these Cut Out Adventure Books have gone for stunning prices. But that is only half the story. To be complete one needs, not just the "book", but the entire Cardboard Theatre. This not so little missing item is always left out of the description. To make what may, or may not, be an appropriate analogy, the book is just the "film". The theatre is the "projector"! One can't properly display the one, without the other. Both, together, is what you see above.

When Buck was good, he was Terrific, and in the area of comic character timepieces, the Buck Rogers pocket watch was simply the best! With its colorful dial, lightning bolt hands, and dramatic box, it deserves to take its rightful place, on center stage.



In the background of the Adventure Book showcase, are two of the game boards from the Buck Rogers Game. The complete game contained three. I believe that made it unique, and like Buck Rogers, himself, ahead of its time, perhaps, previewing the levels in a video game, today. These game boards are a mind boggling graphic experience. The wild, yet harmonious, colors, the clouds, vapor trails, planets, and explosions, all dotted with "X"s, taken together are visually stunning. Yet, if one examines the artwork around the borders, or on the cards, it resembles the doodles of a child. The art lesson that Buck is teaching, may be that the total really can be greater than the sum of all the parts, and if the forest is fantastic, don't look too closely at the trees.

BUCK ROGERS



SIEGE OF GIGANTICA
CITY OF THE HEAVENS



COSMIC ROCKET WARS



SEARCH FOR THE SECRETS OF ATLANTIS
CONTINENT UNDER THE SEA

25TH CENTURY AD

3 Complete GAMES

25TH CENTURY AD

MADE IN U.S.A.



PLAYING THREE BOARDS AT A TIME

The game can be played by two, three, or four players who use the three boards at the same time.

The object of the Buck Rogers Game is to be first in capturing the planet of any one of the boards.

At the start of the game, each player is given a card. The card has a number on it, and a picture of a rocket ship. The number on the card is the player's starting number. The picture of the rocket ship is the player's starting position. The player whose number is 1 starts the game. The player whose number is 2 starts the game. The player whose number is 3 starts the game. The player whose number is 4 starts the game.

HOW TO PLAY BUCK ROGERS GAME

From two to four players can play the game.

The game can be played with as many as twelve players, if desired, by using other players on the other two boards.

PLAYING ONE BOARD AT A TIME

Shuffle the deck and turn each row over one card, moving according to the direction and number of moves indicated in the central square of the card. Shuffle the deck after each play, and draw one card each, again.

When a dynamic card is drawn, the other opponents remain passively until they themselves draw a dynamic card, to maintain the playing forces.

The player reaching center first wins the game.

TIME

When a dynamic card is drawn, the other opponents remain passively until they themselves draw a dynamic card, to maintain the playing forces.

The player reaching center first wins the game.

A TIME

When a dynamic card is drawn, the other opponents remain passively until they themselves draw a dynamic card, to maintain the playing forces.

The player reaching center first wins the game.

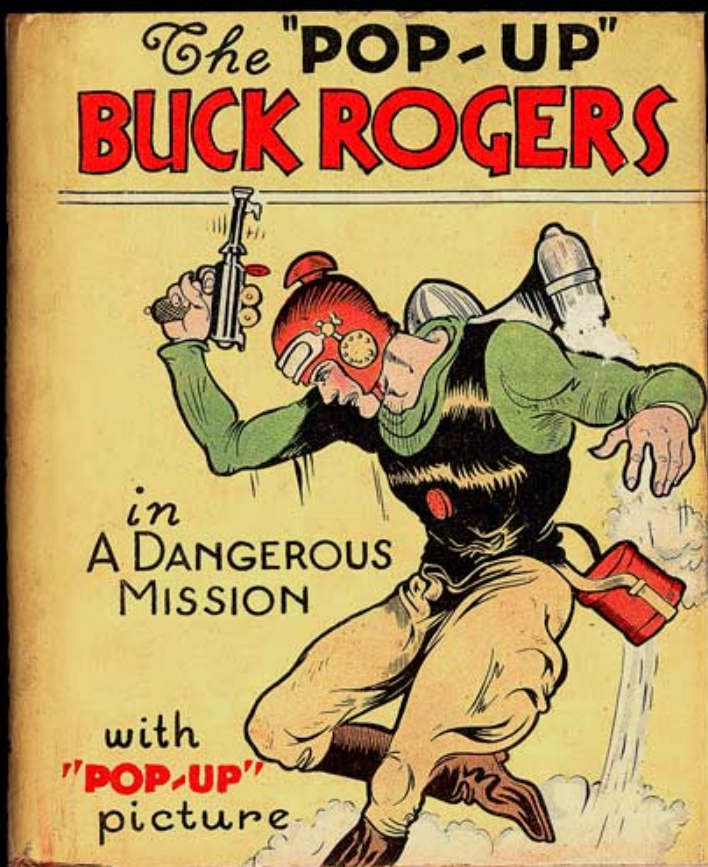


The two Buck Rogers Pop-Up books were certainly quite pleasant. Again the artwork here is not that of a master draftsman. It's really rather crude, yet the impact, especially as the pages open and we see the images move, is effective.



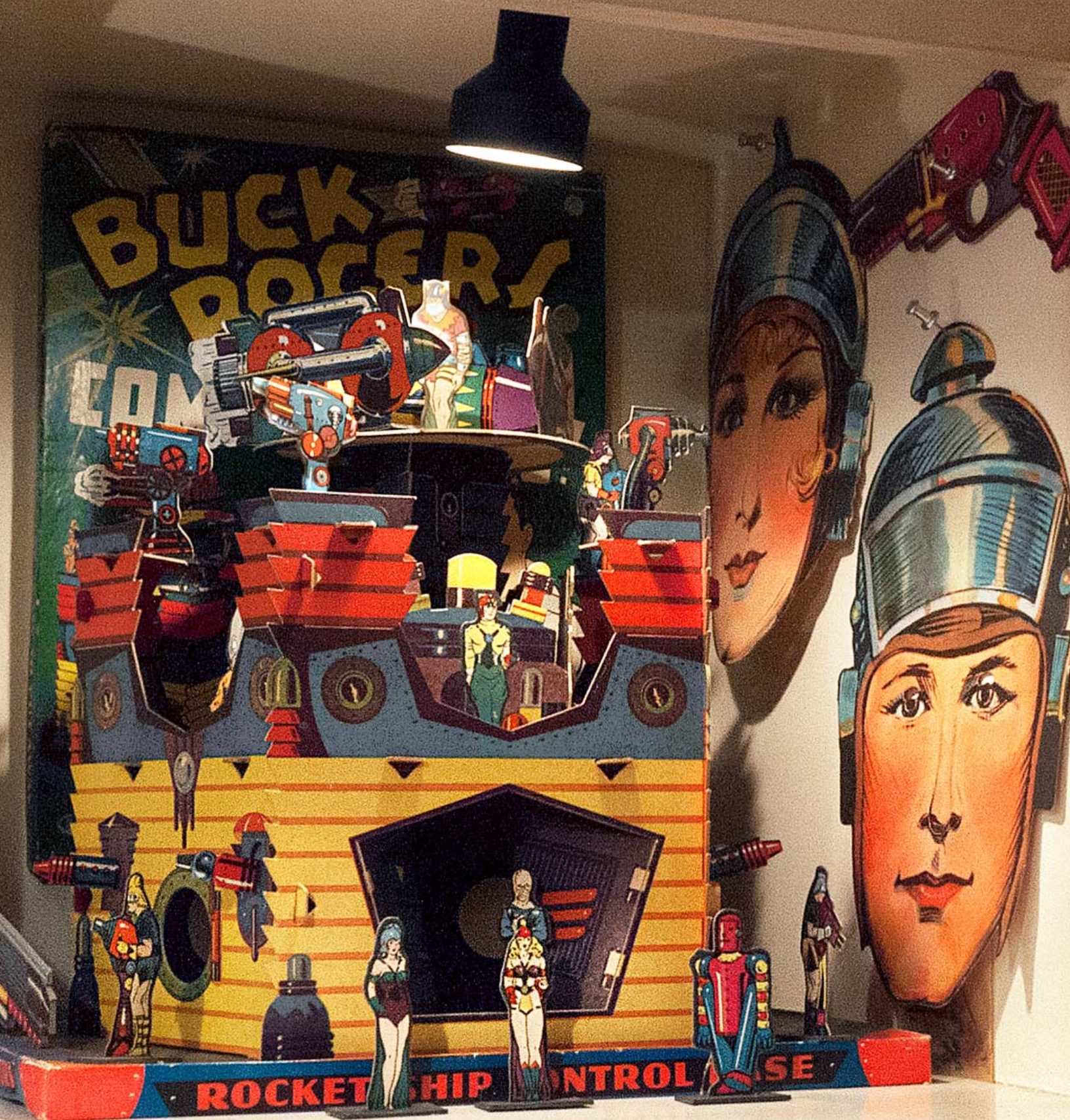


The smaller book is especially pretty. The artwork here is superior to the large one. The center fold with its naive two passenger open air convertible rocket ship, blazing through a firmament of fantasy, is like a precious jewel.



In the category of extraordinary this Buck Rogers "Combat Game " is first rate. I remember when my friend Kenny Kneitel found the first one of these, in 1968. It was missing the box lid and several pieces. He lived on the proceeds for weeks. I have heard of only two more of these, turning up, since then. This is one of them. The toy was made by Warren Paper Products as part of their "Built-Rite" series. In the era of cardboard toys, Built-Rite was king. Forts, gas stations, doll houses, garages and other boring things were all die cut out of heavy card stock and notched together. This Buck Rogers Combat Game was the most exciting product they ever made, and one of the few sets, perhaps the only one, that was based on a licensed property. It includes the Rocket Ship Control Base, several cardboard rocket ships and all the main characters as stand-up figures, There are two rubber band ray guns, with which to shoot them down.

The previous owner of this set, carefully punched it out, and saved all the scraps. He even preserved the original packet of rubber bands. I got this item rather late, and was running out of space, so it ended up in this small showcase, which protects it, but doesn't do it justice.



For the sake of this webpage, and for the fun of it, I took it out, and set it up, to shoot a better photograph, the way it's pictured on the box.



Marx made two Buck Rogers windup rocket ships. Both had a unique mechanism that generated an exhaust trail of flashing sparks. Graphically, the first rocket ship was especially colorful and visually exciting. They're both shown here, blasting off, in this showcase, which they share with my modest collection of Superman. Modest indeed! It consists of just 4 things, one of which, the wind up airplane, is in a different showcase. The wood jointed Superman doll is here, of course. Anything made by Joseph Kallus is something I must have. The Superman doll that he created is very much in the spirit of the fabulous Fleischer Superman cartoons. The third item is the Sirocco figure at the front of the case.

And last of all, is a spectacular target game. This is the only Superman object that I found so exciting that I couldn't resist acquiring a second copy of this delightfully designed exercise in Art Deco, when it came along. The action is dramatic, as one after another highly designed Deco vehicles appear on the tipping see-saw roadway. When a vehicle is shot off the bridge, by a rubber tipped dart, the roadway tilts, and another cardboard vehicle, cradled on a block of wood, slides down to take its place. The images of Superman, and the sweeping Superman logo, on the enormous box, are early and dynamic.



Superman was a content oriented license. It all took place, between the covers of a comic book. The toys and images that it generated were neither plentiful, nor visual. Play sets, action figures, and stuff like that hadn't been invented yet. With the onset of the Second World War, the Golden Age of Comic Characters was coming to an end.

COMIC CAROUSEL FIGURES

I discovered this photograph, the other day, among a bunch of slides. It shows the Carousel figures of Mickey and Minnie as they appeared, the first, or second time I saw them, at Madison Square Garden, or the Armory Show, in NYC. I never traveled with a camera, and I doubt that the show would even allow one. I don't know how I got this Photo.

But, I do remember the encounter. It was like meeting that first cast iron bank at the Paris Flea Market, in 1958, all over again. Now, the year was 1972. We had had been living in the country for two years, and the collection was still packed up. Nonetheless, I continued to collect. Mickey Mouse and Comic Characters remained relatively inexpensive. And I had become a Master Mouse Hunter. My secret method to detect them was the rule of Pie Cut eyes! All "good" old Miceys had them. All "bad" new ones did not! I would take a chance on buying a mouse, sight-unseen, if the seller described it as having pie-cut eyes. Miceys with eyeballs were what I considered "new" (and still do). They were off the menu! Now, here I was, once again, confronting, not one, but two interesting sculptures, and my pie-cut eye rule was placing them out of bounds. But, I had to admit, as works of art, I found them fascinating.



All of this was academic, because the asking price was ridiculous. I proclaimed that, even if I were a millionaire, I still would never spend \$3,000 on that pair. I wasn't the only one who thought that way. I saw them at two different shows, and, obviously, they weren't going anywhere.

In the summer of the following year I was contacted by an ad agency that was planning a Christmas Show for Bamberger's Department store in Newark New Jersey, celebrating Mickey Mouse's 40th birthday. My collection was still packed away, and our lives remained in disarray. So, I explained that I could not participate. But from the things they said on the phone,

I could see that they didn't know much about Mickey Mouse. Therefore, I invited them to visit my house for a complimentary crash course in Mickey. A few days after the occasion, they called and offered me \$3,500, if I would loan them my collection, for a few weeks in December. I really liked the people, but I turned the offer down. I guess you see where this is going. But I sincerely meant it! It simply wasn't worth the money to me to unpack the whole collection, and imperil it in Newark, which at that time, was the most troubled city in New Jersey. So, I gave them the names and addresses of my some of collector friends and suggested that they contact them.

A few weeks later, I was walking through one of the antiques centers in Manhattan, when I noticed the woman, who always shared a booth with the man who owned the wooden mice. We got into a conversation, and I asked, in passing, if her friend still had them. Yes, he did, and she very emphatically proclaimed that his price had gone up! It was, now, firmly fixed at \$3,500! I found that rather comical. If something doesn't sell, raise the price! I also learned he was her husband! She gave me their card.

Driving home, along the Palisades Parkway, a wild thought occurred to me: What I wouldn't do for money, I would consider doing for Mickey! I considered it all the way home, and by the time I got there, I had made up my mind. So, I went right to the phone and called my friend at the ad agency, and proposed the following: If they were still interested in using my collection, I would be willing to do it for No money. Just get me those two mice! This offered a double benefit, as they would also enhance the show! Without a second's hesitation, he replied, "It's a deal!" And for good measure, it was agreed that when the show was over, I would get to keep any cabinets that were custom made. Oh, and there was one more thing, a Snow White cel that was in a local antique shop. It was not expensive, but would look good as part of the display. He gladly said OK. Remember this was 1973, I didn't realize, at the moment, that the cel that caught my eye, in a humble shop in Newburgh, for a relatively modest price, was actually the ultimate Snow White cel of all time.

So here are the two figures as they appeared at Bambergers. They really looked terrific!



Meanwhile, I learned more about the carvings. They had been the crowning decorations on a French Carousel. I had no concept of the iconography of Mickey, European style, in 1973, so I didn't realize that my rule, regarding Pie-cut eyes, might not apply. These objects could have been patterned after the rolling eyes on the first English Mickey dolls by Deans, circa 1930. Not that it mattered, for I had taken yet another step forward, and embraced these works of art for what they were, Works of Art!

In the months before the show, my little hands were busy unpacking things, and listing them for the insurance policy that Bambergers intended to take out with, would you believe, Lloyds of London. Meanwhile, my little mind was working overtime, thinking up creative ways to display them, ways that required lots of fancy frames and complex custom cabinetry. I'd call up, every other day, with another bright idea and the Bambergers embraced them all. They really let out all the stops, and spared no expense on the show.



The culmination of this came when I convinced them that they needed a set of giant Mickey furniture, faithful reproductions of the 1934 originals, enlarged, beyond adult size. I had the patterns already drawn up, as it was a project I hoped to do myself, someday. Bambergers loved the idea and got their wood shop to make the parts, and then send up the blank panels for me to paint. OY! They arrived here late, with only a week to go, before the show! I worked on them night and day. Somewhat, afraid that if I didn't get them done, I'd be billed for the carpentry. But I finished them in time for Bambergers to pick them up and assemble them, down there, without a day to spare.



The show was successful. Some notable Mickey Mouse collectors and authors got their start right there. And, as Promised, after it was over, the Mice, the frames, the showcases and the furniture all came back here. And here the mice are now, newly arrived. It is the spring of 1974. They are the first of many more Carousel figures to follow, standing proudly in the bleak and barren schoolroom that would, one day, become "Mouse Heaven"

With the Great Wall to be, behind them, and the newly fabricated furniture gathered around them, soon to be scattered all around the house, the Carousel figures stand on a pedestal made from a pair of shipping crates that, eventually, will be replaced by an 800 pound sub-woofer. I've sat before that unit, listening to music, hour after hour, day after day, year after year, right up to the present time, and, all the while, my eyes have endlessly traced every curve and nuance of these sculptures. The more I looked at them the more I admired them, the bulbous forms, the insane ears, seen with abstract objectivity as oval orbs. No matter how many times I saw them, I never grew tired of them.



With the coming of the Kennedy International toy Show, American collectors discovered the Old World. For me, it proved to be a whole New World of Comic imagery. And the leading European dealers, who dabbled, from time to time, in Comic Characters soon discovered me. Once they did, dabbling often turned to "specializing", finding "special" things for me.

Many of the most spectacular objects in Mouse Heaven, especially those that came from France, are here thanks to one man, Pierre Boogaerts. Pierre is a far seeing insightful dealer author artist. He wrote the first book on collecting Robots in 1978, years before they were popular. Having done that, he moved on to the next up and coming thing. Pierre was always years ahead of everybody in forecasting trends. And I am thankful that he focused his amazing powers of discovery on finding treasures to offer me. Anything in Mouse Heaven that is big and spectacular, and French, is, no doubt, here, thanks to Pierre. Especially, the parade of Carousel Figures that he steered my way.

They are located throughout the house. At rough count, I believe there are 11, in all. A few came from other sources, but those that are, by far, the most spectacular, came from Pierre. Charlie Chaplin, who we have met elsewhere, is arguably the most exquisite. He was in Pierre's own collection, for many years, before he intrusted him to me.



Charlie came from a carousel in Belgium. Possibly, by the same carver as this rather serious looking Popeye. Charlie was in incredible condition when I got him. He has never been repainted. This is unusual, unheard of really, most carousel figures got a new coat of paint, every year. And with each coat, a chapter in its history was covered over. This can be, either horrible, or attractive. In Popeye's case, it was a disaster. Beneath one ugly color after another, the real Popeye was hiding. Every time I looked at him, he bugged me, and begged me, to set him free.



One really should not attempt to remove these coats of paint, because there is no stopping, no separating the layers; one leads right into the other. But Popeye was different. A little exploration revealed that his original surface was oil paint that had been coated with shellac, several times, in the years, before the odious repainting began. This created a barrier that, I hoped, would protect the bottom layers from the solvents necessary to remove the more recent coats of paint. And so, I undertook the task. The result was spectacular. What you see here, is Popeye's original surface, fully revealed, with absolutely no retouching! Why someone saw fit to paint over it, in the first place, is a mystery.



Here is a photo, shot, several years ago, of Popeye, eyeing some of his relatives.



This second Popeye figure is also from Belgium. It is considerably more recent, but still old. This is a popular configuration that was mass produced, as opposed to the last, which was carved by hand. The image of Popeye, riding on a rocket has been used everywhere, on everything, from carousels to individual coin operated rides. I like its slick and elegant styling. His patina is now half original with no over painting remaining, from the butt up. After days of meticulous scraping, Popeye and I, both, agreed that the bright blue on his lower pants, and the remaining bright red on the rocket, is actually quite pretty, with little to be gained, visually, by removing it. So, we left it as it was.





I always preferred this elegant Olive Oyl, to her companion piece downstairs. She rides her rocket, gracefully, beneath the skylight in my studio. And is, apparently, the rarer of the pair. Check out the sweeping curvature of her back, the lyrical bending of her knees, echoed by the soles of her enormous feet, the flamboyant flourish of her hair. Even the metal handle curves curvaceously. This is an exquisite sculpture, sensuously stylized and sophisticated, voluptuously realized in wood. Even in her "Reel Life", Olive never looked this good!



The rest of the carousel figures you are about to see are all from France. There are two Mickeys, bending over. They are intended to carry a single rider. The styling is obviously the same as the pair of standing figures that appeared at Bambergers. They might even have come from the same carousel. One is perched on the balcony wall, beside the stereo.



Be careful Mickey! Don't look down!



The second Mickey is tucked in, beside the spiral staircase, waiting, in the dark at the top of the stairs, for someone to ascend, and turn on all the lights, up there.



“Wow! This was worth waiting for!” says he.



Ducking out of sight, behind the corner of the the bell tower, we find a French Donald Duck. He is one of the French Carousel family. Disney characters appeared on French Carousels, frequently, and illegally, throughout the 1930s. I have been told that small independently owned carousels were a familiar sight, often located out by the Gates of Paris. Some may still be there today. I regret the fact that I never encountered one of these, in my brief year there. That is yet another item, along with the Mona Lisa, that I must add to the list of sights I didn't see.





Flying over the Great Hall, is Mickey in an airplane. The coded message on his license plate translates to read "The Ace of Aces." I have this wired to the stereo, so that the wing lights illuminate when it is played. They're on a lot, all day! In the sky beyond him we get a preview peek at some Old King Cole Displays.





And Now, the Best Carousel Figure of all! Pierre bid on this for me in a French auction. He is all original. Some of his many coats of paint are flaking, and he was much better looking when I got him, but I am not touching anything. Like me, he is deteriorating. We are both hanging on together. He was actually cut right out of the carousel. A portion of the original floor, itself, including the wheel housing, is still firmly attached to his feet. When mounted on the carousel, Mickey would have been pulling a cart or rickshaw, with a passenger in the seat.



There must have also been leather reins, for the metal bridle, to which they were attached, is still clentched between his teeth.



Mickey's legs are cast iron; all the rest is made of wood. The carvers metal plaque is still attached to his foot. The styling of this Mickey Monument is outrageous, and utterly unconventional! His grinning teeth and lolling tongue are audacious. His feet are like sausages. His body is round and enormous. His arms are sharp, with elbows pointed. And his amazing ears resemble something out of King Neptune's Realm.



This Gargantuan collection of unexpected elements has a fierce, and, frightening, presence. He is a Giant among mice, a Colossus of the Carousel. Nonetheless, with mighty Mickey towering over me, I bravely broached the subject of his skin condition, and suggested the possibility of enhancing it cosmetically, offering him a choice of anything, from a minor make-over to a “Lifetime Lift”? As you might remember, I have an aptitude for restoration.

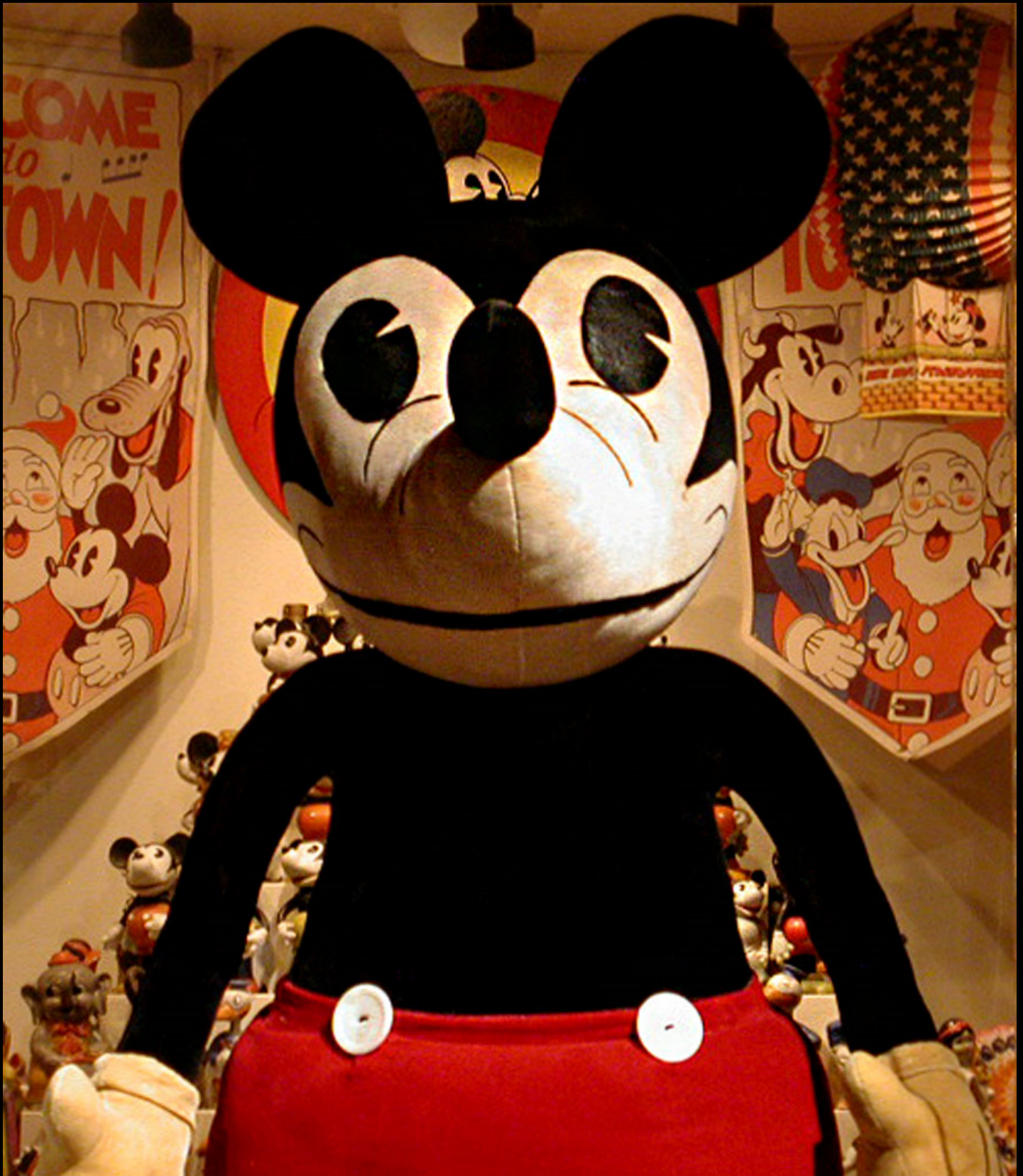
Mickey looked down at me, menacingly. He rolled his scary pie-cut eyes, and gnashed his terrible teeth, and said, “What! Don’t you like the way I look?”

“No! I love it!” I replied. “I was just asking! Never mind!”

“I yam what I yam!” I heard him exclaim. Comic Characters always say the same thing. Then, flashing a big toothy grin, this awesome effigy, I always called “The Walking Mickey”, gently warned me, “I can be friendly, But Keep Your Hands Off Me!” and walked away.



THE BIG MICKEY DOLL



Unabashed idolatry of Mickey requires an idol worthy of adulation. That is where “The Big Doll” comes in. Second, only, to the gigantic 1930s Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade balloon, in terms of pure raw overwhelming awesomeness, is the Big Mickey Mouse doll, created by Charlotte Clark, very early on. This imposing figure was once the official surrogate and stand-in, whenever Mickey Mouse was required to appear in person. That being with Walt Disney, himself, or in multiple locations at movie theaters and special occasions, anywhere, across the nation.



And, because these imposing idols were handmade, each one looked a little different, at least, to an eye trained in observing every Minute variation in the constantly changing image of the Great God Mickey. Some were downright perfect, like those that appear with Disney, in this two page spread in this 1935 article in Playthings Magazine.



Later that same day, he was presented at a gala event, celebrating the same.



Mickey Mania diminished and faded, in the late thirties, to disappear almost entirely in the 1940s. As Mickey Mouse was pushed aside by newer Disney properties, personal appearances, and the big dolls that made them, were no longer required. And so, these dolls, made in unknown quantities, disappeared. Some, it is hoped, went into hiding, and survived.

Never in my wildest dreams, as a collector, did I think that I would ever own one. It is a Fantasy! And, in the end, that is all that it might be. The truth is, even though, I actually got one, I'm not really sure I own one; I mean a real one. But what I do have fills the space, visually and emotionally, in my heart, in my collection, and in this large showcase.



A number of these dolls have appeared, relatively recently. The one above, is one of those. The expression “Too Good to be True” might apply to all of them. For in a masterstroke of irony, the very thing that, in the eyes of some, might appear to be their greatest asset, the fact that all of them are pristine MINT, becomes, for others, the foremost element that casts doubt upon their authenticity. They look, feel, and, indeed, might be, brand new! The fact that each successive one is a little different, as if, someone, out there, is constantly trying to get it right, adds to the mystery. And, a Mystery, is just exactly what it is.

The bottom line is, I have not solved this mystery, and barring some great revelation, I don’t believe I ever will. But, just for the fun of it, I’ll share some of the clues with you.

Several years ago a multi-zillionaire declared that he wanted to put together the World's best collection of Comic Characters. What the allure of that might be, beats me! But that was his desired goal. Like a great vacuum cleaner he sucked up every Comic Character Collectible that was not nailed down. Being that he knew absolutely nothing about the subject, dealers and collectors, alike, came out of the woodwork, and offered him everything, at three or more times the going price. He was reputed to have stated that his greatest pleasure was seeing grown collectors cry, when he took their toys away, with the power of his dollars. Some, on the other hand, have suggested that they might have, actually, been laughing ... all the way to the bank.

This feeding frenzy culminated in the purchase of one of the several known pairs of ruby slippers. Then he clicked his heels together, and went back to Kansas, I mean St. Louis. And having all but ruined the hobby, he sold the whole thing off, at multiple auctions, for a fraction of the sucker prices he had paid. Those "Rare" items that he had overpaid for, so outrageously that he could never recoup a fraction of his money, he reportedly retained.

Among the items he acquired was a series of six or so Mickey mouse dolls that were claimed to be from the Charlotte Clark estate. Each was mint. Each was about 20 inches tall. And each was a little different. Although, they all looked like they had been sewn, at the same time, they traced the development of the doll's styling, from Charlotte's first version, to later ones, with narrow hips, etc. I only saw them in a photograph, but the story that I heard was puzzling. One aspect of it that I filed away, was the statement that the place of origin of these dolls was Las Vegas.

There was also one doll in the "set" that more than all the others, set off alarms in me. The final doll in the lineup was one, rendered in black and white! That sent me a signal that there was something seriously suspect about them. It wasn't merely black and white, as the earliest Mickeys were, in Europe, but it was rendered in various shades of gray, as if one took a black and white photograph of a full color doll. This is a totally modern concept, one only sees this historically and intuitively incorrect and cutesy sort of thing in Disney shops, today, as an attempt to create clever variations.

Several years later, a young man in Las Vegas offered, one after another, some dolls, reputed to be Charlotte Clarks, on eBay. The first looked slightly off to me. The second was more convincing. I bid on it, and bought it, as it was an odd size, 22 inches. In person, it was puzzling. There was not only a strange look about it, but what really was unsettling was the fact that the wires in the legs ended at the ankles, rather than extending into the feet, and bending over, to allow the doll to stand securely. It was, as if, somebody copied the parts of the doll that they could see, but didn't realize what should have been going on, inside. I kept the doll, which is a decision that I, now, regret. It stands, with difficulty, to the right in the big case in the tall tower.

Then the same seller, who claimed to also be a Disney collector, mainly, of Alice in Wonderland, showed me another doll. This one was a "Big Mickey". It was clear that he was on the brink of offering it to me, but there was something about it that led me not to pursue it, something highly suspect about its look. I asked him about the wires in the legs. He said he couldn't tell. Well here is the doll as he showed it to me, standing on his dining room table, beside a smaller modern Lars doll. What do you think? Look at the strange hips, the buttons widely placed, one can see those on the back, from the front, the hands are extra-large. The face, on the other hand looked pretty good, although Mickey's mouth seemed to be positioned quite low, (side view) and then again, there was the fact that it all looked brand new. Although, both he and the dolls were located in Las Vegas, he claimed he was getting them from his mother, who lived in LA.



Around the same time, a big doll appeared on eBay. The ad for it was "whispering", in that the impact of the doll's size was not emphasized in the copy or visually conveyed. The minimum bid seemed outrageous for an ordinary doll, and only the number 54" revealed its size. If one didn't read the fine print, it looked quite ordinary, like any other Charlotte Clark doll, but with a bigger price. There were several aspects of this particular doll I liked. First of all, it was located in Boston. There appeared to be nothing that I could detect, upon questioning the seller, that would connect it to Las Vegas. Secondly, I liked its look.



Compared to the doll I was being shown, from Las Vegas, it was totally different, and had a look about it that was far more credible. Side by side, the doll from Vegas made the one from Boston look more genuine, while the one from Boston made the other look more fake!



Isn't it amazing what placing them, side by side, reveals! Suddenly, the one from Las Vegas looks brand new! The one from Boston appears old. The one from Vegas has arms that, now, seem enormous, huge hands, a fat tail, no abdomen, his crotch is only inches away from his belt line, legs much shorter, no shoulders, shoes bright orange, gloves pale yellow, and check out those hips! Yet, when the dolls are not compared, side by side, the Vegas doll, almost, looks, all right. Almost, but not quite!

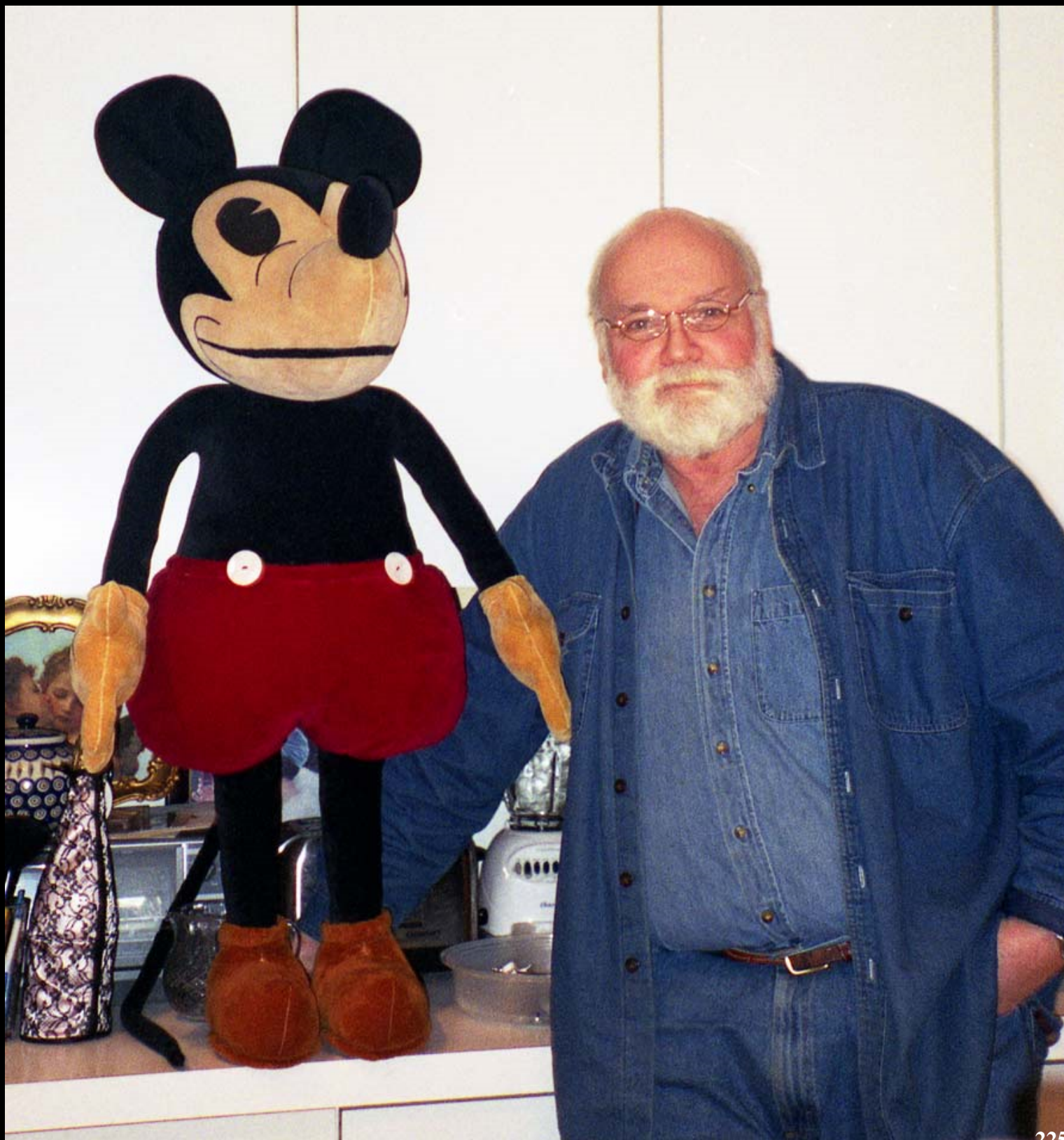
Last of all, I liked the story the young lady, who was selling it, told about its origin: She claimed that she was told that it was won at a raffle at a meeting of the Mickey Mouse club at a Boston theater, by a young boy, who placed it in the attic, where it remained, untouched, for all these years. The seller who was a college student, and, I assumed from her name, of Asian ancestry, sent her fiancée to a house sale, to seek furniture for their new apartment. She was about to enter graduate school, and money was scarce. He came back with a night table, and this doll. She researched it, (told me which book), and put it on eBay .

She, guilelessly, revealed that a dealer (who turned out to be a friend of mine) who actually lives in Boston, but was out of town, had called her and expressed his intention to come see the doll, in person, after the auction. All this, she openly disclosed. I guess he, like me, believed it wasn't going to sell. I assessed the credibility of the whole story, which, like her demeanor, seemed honest, straightforward, and believable. Then, I placed the minimum bid on the doll to lock it up. Mine was the only bid.

I speculated that my dealer friend did not feel secure investing in the doll if he did not see it first. And he, too, was, most likely, convinced, by the understated eBay presentation, that it would not sell. He might have also figured that, after the auction was over, he could whittle down the price. Of course, once I bought it, that put a certain stamp of authenticity on it. The fact is, I was not certain at all, but I figured that even if it was not "real", it was so well done that it was worth the money, real or not. I sent a bank transfer, the next day. And the young lady, who generously insisted on paying for the postage, herself, sent it out by UPS.

It arrived here in a snow storm. Our driveway, and all the roads were sheets of ice. I checked the delivery schedule, and watched the UPS truck slow down, hesitate at the foot of our driveway, then drive away. Years ago, I had learned the secret phone number of UPS in Poughkeepsie, so, I phoned and asked if I could come and pick the package up, myself, that night. The dispatcher said OK! So, I bundled up, and drove off, into one of the worst nights of my life. After hours of driving in blinding snow and darkness, and getting lost, several times, I, finally, found the place, deep within an industrial park, marked by only a few bare light bulbs, and not a living soul in sight. A long line of UPS trucks was parked, outside. Inside was a hive of

activity. Several dozen men were toiling over packages on a maze of moving conveyor belts, and all ignoring me. Finally I found one willing to point me in the general direction of the trucks, and I walked along the deserted line, outside, in the darkness, on the ice. All the big back doors were open wide, and all the trucks were empty. It was like a hallucinatory scene in a bad dream. Finally, I came to, nearly, the last one, and way at the back of the empty truck was one large box, with poor Mickey inside. I was stunned! Anyone could have taken him! I clamored up into the truck, and lugged the package out. I dragged it, through the building, signed the paper work, and managed to cram the box into my station wagon. Mickey and I survived the perilous journey home, arriving close to midnight. I opened the box, and placed Big Mickey on the kitchen Counter. Eunice took this photo.



Did seeing him in person, finally, convince me he was real? Not really. It did not spontaneously solve the mystery. At the same time I could detect no false note. The doll itself looked Marvelous! The fabric looked as good as new, but could be old. The mother of pearl buttons were not plastic. The wires inside extended securely into his feet. He had been uniformly stuffed, tight as a drum, and lump-free, by commercial machine. If this was fake, the forger had not missed a beat. The only point that I found hard believe was, again, the fact that he was so amazingly mint. If I had just purchased him at the local shopping mall, I would find it difficult to get him home this clean. The drive to the Galleria Mall takes 50 minutes. This guy had traveled 50 years to get to me, spotlessly. Well, actually, there was one spot on his cheek that showed the signs of age, a sort of small erosive hole, cause unknown, but natural. I welcomed the presence of this telling imperfection. I was beginning to Believe!.

Now the problem was where to put him. He stood on my desk, next to the computer for several weeks.



Finally, I bit the bullet, and traveled to Canal Street in NYC, my old stomping grounds. And found, to my dismay, that Industrial Plastic Supply, a place I went to often, and often saw Andy Warhol, there, by the way, was gone! I found another plastic store, farther along the road and ordered all the Plexiglas I needed to construct a showcase. The prices were sky-high! This was no Industrial Plastic Supply!

Bill Maxwell had built for me the two panels that would make up a large showcase with a low flat top, years before. I never used them. Over the years the surface had been ruined, from lying around. So, now, I sanded the parts and sprayed them white, and completed the case with panels of Plexiglas, and added lights. It would supply the base, on which the Big Mickey's case would stand. One problem remained; there was no place to put this thing! In the end, I did something outrageous! I placed it right smack in the middle of everything, right in front of the Pyramid of Biskes, blocking the Felix case. It looks audacious, but on purpose! The lower section now contains the Mickey bike that I had intended to sit on top of that lower unit, when I asked Bill to build it. That, and some dolls and other things are safely in there, now, and the big Mickey stands on top. It worked out Great!





As for the mystery of the giant mice; It continued! Several months later, another big Mickey appeared on eBay. Guess where? Yep! Las Vegas! This one looked better than the last one, but it was strangely tall and thin. "Elongated", might be the word. The minimum bid on it was 50% higher than the minimum on mine had been. This time my dealer friend in Boston was taking no chances. His collector in California must have expressed regret that he missed the mouse that went to me. So, he immediately entered the, now considerably higher, minimum bid. And, as might be expected, he got the doll for that! He, then, flew to Las Vegas to pick it up, and flew, with the doll, from there, to deliver it, in person, to his benefactor.



A year later, two more dolls appeared on eBay. This time there was a Minnie as well. The minimum bid for both was twice what mine had been, for one, which seemed fair enough. My friend Carl Lobel and I discussed getting them together. I'd take Minnie and he'd get Mickey. Carl never followed through, I didn't mind, This new Mickey looked quite different from mine, So I was not sure that the Minnie would be compatible with my Mickey, anyway. And with Mickey now dominating Mouse Heaven, a Minnie stuck off to one side would merely be redundant.



Would you care to venture a guess where these dolls were located? Las Vegas? WOW! I'm impressed! how did you know? The dolls just sat there by the way. The auction came to an end. Nobody bid!

Here are the four Mickeys, all together, in a little comparative montage I made up at the time, three from Las Vegas and one from Boston. It's clear from studying the photos that all the mice from Vegas are related. The Boston Mickey is the odd mouse out. I wouldn't bet my life on the authenticity of any one of them, but I am happy with the choice I made. What do you think? Which one would you take?



By the way, Who says: "What happens in Vegas, stays there"? Although the latest pair from Vegas didn't sell on eBay. The owner, then, placed them in a Ted Hake Auction, where they made auction History! I don't know what's rarer, two bidders who would pay the kind of price they went for, or the fact that someone into Mickey Mouse that deep would not have known about the dolls when they were on eBay, where they went begging, at 15% of what the auction buyer was willing to pay, which ironically is what the Auction Buyer's Premium turned out to be.

All this Mickey Magic pouring out of Vegas is cause for a degree of wonder. I know as a collector, there are certain places rich in treasure. The state of Pennsylvania, for instance. It is with good reason that there are so many flea markets and Antique centers there, all those old homes in Philly, where so many generations lived. It is an area, rich with centuries of history.

When I was nine, my parents and I drove cross country. We visited Las Vegas, and I hated it! One reason was because I got the worst sunburn of my life. I remember Vegas, well. There were a few casinos and lots of motels, baking in the burning sun. The fabulous electric sign displays of today were modest then. I recall one animated cowboy sign that moved one arm, as if he was thumbing a ride. Perhaps, like me, he wanted to get out of town. I played the nickel slot machines. That was the highlight, there was little else, but lots of nothingness surrounded by untold miles of burning sand. Perhaps I would have liked it better if I had known there were so many Miceys there. The year was 1947; who could have guessed that ten years before, it must have been a bustling metropolis of Mickey Mice, who found an extraordinary place to hide, where they could safely survive the fading rays of desert sun, and defy the ravages of time, to emerge from hiding, one after another, fifty years later, and not look a day older. The time has come for me to go there! If only I had Ruby Slippers, I would click them, now!

Now, let's take a look at the last lower case! The one that supplies the base for the Big Mickey. The Mickey bike is there, ridden by a genuine Steiff. A real Charlotte Clark doll stands by its side, while an oversized chubby Mickey doll, a rare Deans variation that comes from England stands on the other side. The Betty Boop Boudoir doll is, also, here. And, carrying out the tricycle theme, is Ignatz on a tricycle, and a nice pair of celluloid Mickey and Minnie, on tricycles, as well.







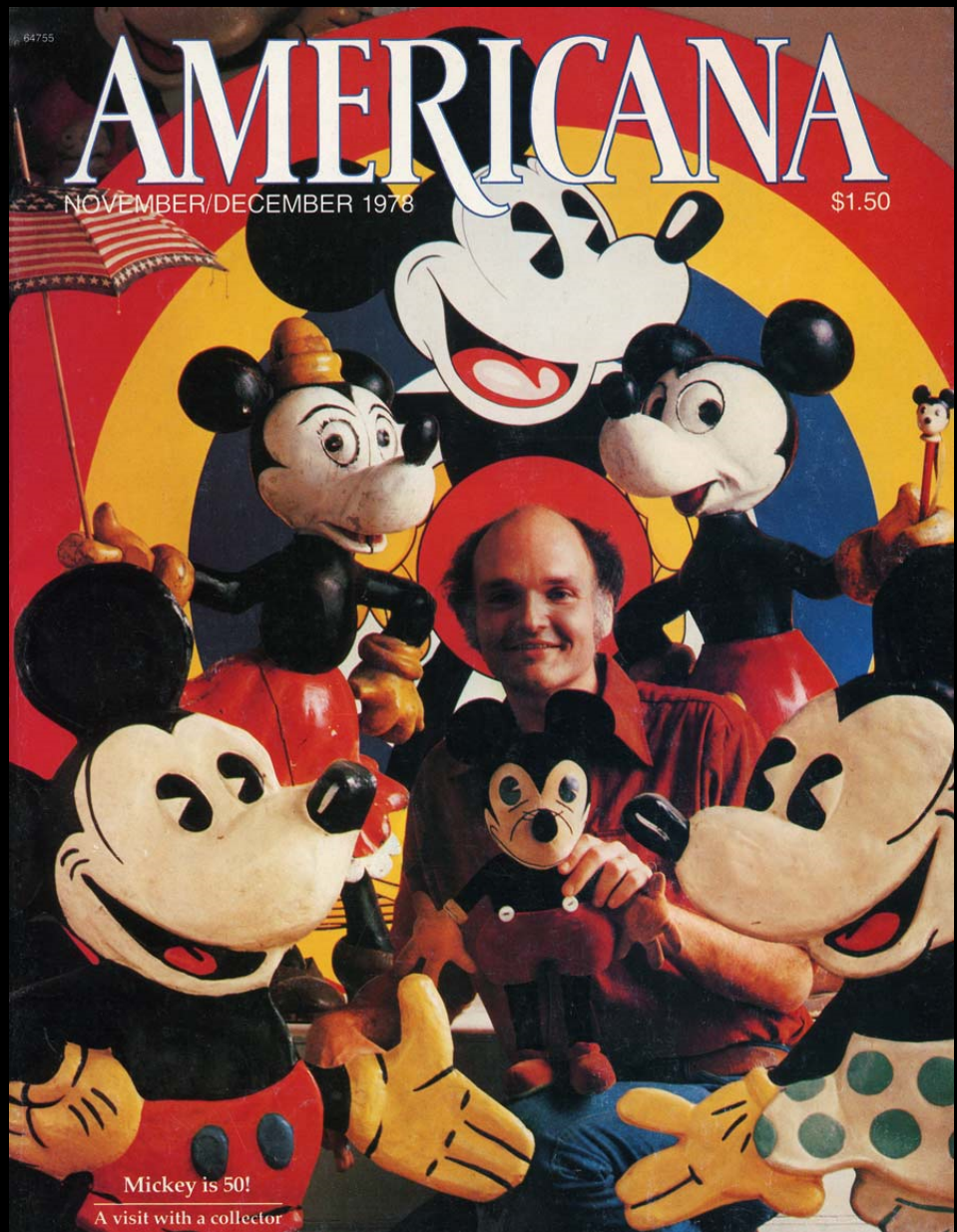
Just to the right, a little out of camera range, are a couple of my Favorite Things. Well visit with them next.

FAVORITE THINGS

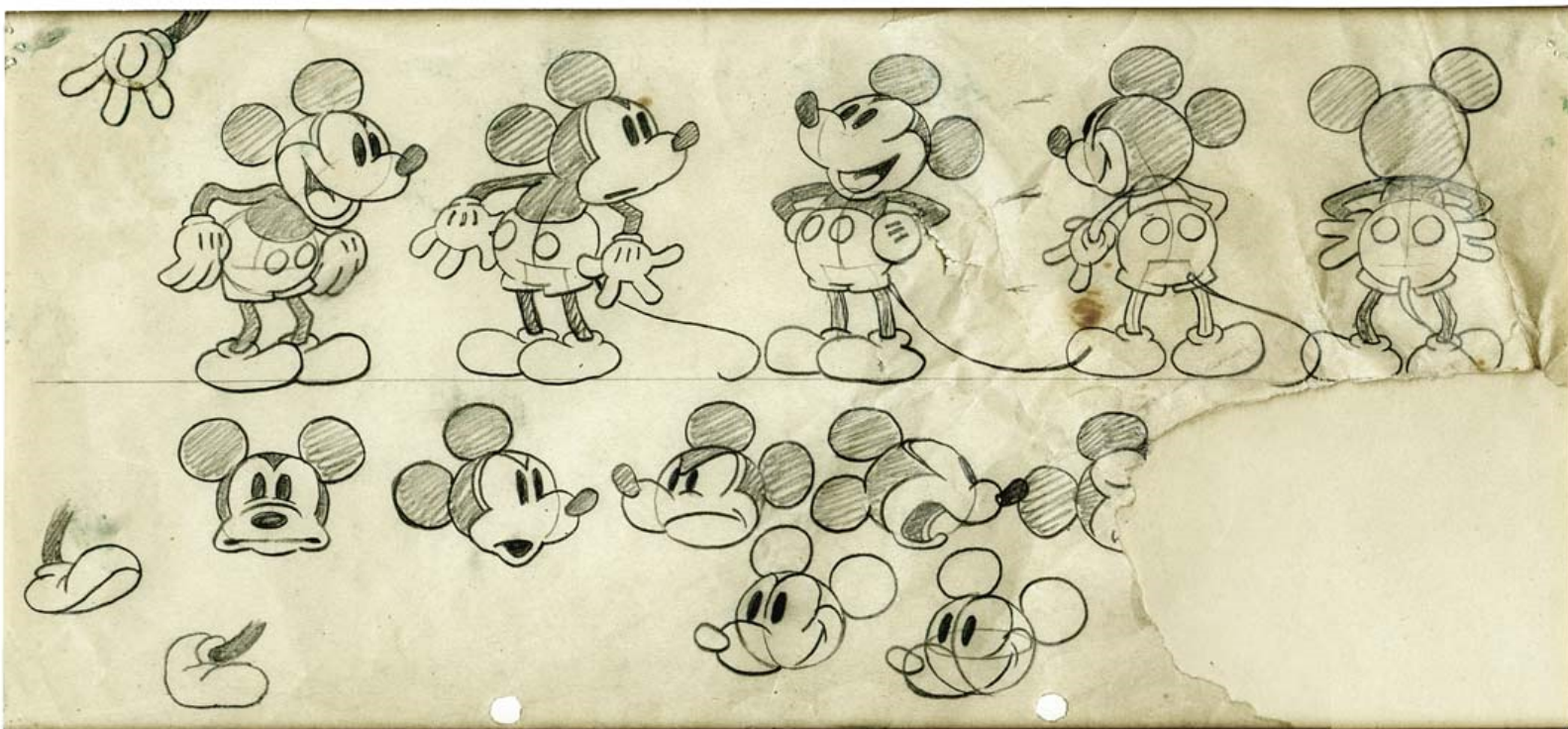
There are many Fascinating facets to collecting, and if one enters into the activity, wholeheartedly, amazing things can happen. One can be swept away by the belief that Fate and Destiny are at play. Gratifying, is the treasure earned by hard work and effort. Making sure you're in the right place, at the right time, following the slimmest lead, and digging doggedly, all these activities require effort, and that effort is often justifiably rewarded. Does Fate play a role in these discoveries that you worked so hard, while loving every minute of it, to achieve? Maybe! Maybe, Destiny offered you the lead that you pursued with perseverance, guiding you to be at a certain place, at a certain moment, when a van pulled up, and began to unpack.

On the other hand, there are moments when, through no effort of your own, Fate, alone, decrees that some great thing will come your way. A kind of a gratuitous surprise, like a puppy in a basket, left on your doorstep, in the dead of night, that you willingly adopt, and who grows up to be your best friend, and one of the great joys of your life. That is one of those times, when Destiny decides what gifts will be bestowed upon you. And you are so overwhelmed by your good fortune that you dare not break the spell of the euphoria to question why.

It was a moment like that, when these favorite objects were dropped into my life. Seemingly, out of nowhere, this gift was offered. Its arrival on my doorstep, figuratively speaking, was announced, ahead of time, by a letter from a young lady in England, sent to the editor of Americana Magazine, who forwarded it to me. Why Americana Magazine? Good question! I have no idea why an article about this, then young, collection appeared in the November/December 1978 issue of that magazine. Stranger still, is the fact that a picture of yours truly ended up on the cover, looking somewhat saintly with a Mickey Mouse target halo. By the way, the photo, below, was not pasted together. There was no Photoshop, in those days. What you see was actually happening in real life". Everything is actual size, including that giant target, eight feet wide!



This unaccountable appearance in Americana led to two amazing acquisitions, and, as if Fate had orchestrated both, they bore a curious resemblance to one another. The first, which happened soon after the article appeared, was a treasure trove of early animation art that included the original pencil drawing for the first Mickey Mouse model sheet. Burt Gillette, an early Disney animator, who, among other things, designed the first Mickey Mouse toy, was a friend of the family of a lady in New Jersey. He left an entire box of animation drawings with them in the early 1930s, when she was a little girl, and never asked for them again. She had, recently, offered them to Disney. Their archivist was not interested, "We have lots of that stuff!" he replied. Then, she saw the article in Americana Magazine, and, through them, offered them to me. I, of course, eagerly embraced the opportunity.



The second happy consequence of that article, an incredible pair of Mickey and Minnie Mouse Ventriloquist dolls from England, took place, a few years later. The lady who had them knew nothing about these figures, other than the fact that they had been placed, by chance, in her parent's custody, in 1938. She was not allowed to touch them, or, God Forbid, play with them, as a kid, being cautioned by her mother, that their rightful owner would return for them, one day, when the War was over. He never did.

The process of acquiring the animation drawings had been easy, compared to what it took to get Mickey and Minnie! I'll spare you the gory details of negotiating a price, Yikes! Which was only half the problem, the other being, how to get them here safely, and avoid the possibility of another US customs horror story, like one that took place when I tried to import a crate full of Lars dolls, years before. Did you know that its illegal to bring foreign made Disney items, into the USA? In the end, a friend of a friend, who was a pilot on BOAC, carried them over, personally.

Of course, you know what's in the trunk. A trunk, which, in case you haven't noticed, is, itself, a knock out, fall down, gorgeous, thing of beauty. I was recently interviewed on You Tube, and asked what my favorite object in the collection might be. I replied that in case of fire, I would grab the Ventriloquist dolls. My friend Noel Barrett, after seeing the interview, emailed me, saying, "I agree with your choice. That's what I would also take, and, by the way, don't forget to grab the trunk!"



I remember when Noel saw this trunk and its contents for the first time. He was impressed, to say the least. When it comes to seeing right to the heart of any object, Noel is the most perceptive person I have ever met. No one could be better qualified to be an appraiser on the Antiques Roadshow than he. Upon examining every detail, Noel remarked profoundly, "These are a complete collection in themselves! You could give away all the rest, and just keep these". Then carefully examining the suitcase, he decreed, "This paint has been on here a long time." Not that I had any doubt, or, for that matter, cared, but nonetheless, this survivor of a Golden Age had just been officially authenticated by the best!

There were the two figures, lying, side by side, in a posh interior of royal purple velvet. Dracula, himself, could not ask for a more elegant, or safe, resting place, in which to escape the ravages of time. They had, in fact, been sleeping there for nearly half a century.

Describing the dolls, themselves, is not easy. In terms of how they look, they are amazing! In person, they have a presence that is larger than life, larger than you could, or would, imagine from photographs. I love the styling! They capture Mickey and Minnie, right at the point when they were most appealing. Every detail is perfect. It's almost as if they come from another universe, where high heel shoes in Minnie's size can be purchased at any shoe store, and simple things, like the Mother of pearl oval buttons on Mickey's pants, are commonplace commodities.





The construction and craftsmanship is awe inspiring. The dolls, themselves, all the hard parts, that is, are carved out of wood, polychromed and polished to perfection. The rest is made from a variety of materials. Minnie's little English style hat, appears to be genuine beaver, as some of the early drawings would imply. Her dress is iridescent printed velvet, with perfect white polka dots, and intricately pleated. Alas, I have seen it fade somewhat, since I removed her from "the box". I kept the dolls in there for several years. But, finally, they convinced me that they wanted to be free, so out they came, and have remained, for many years. Minnie's shoes and Mickey's too, are "real". I mean, I have no better words to describe them than that. They must have come from a shoe store in Mickey Mouse Land. They appear to be manufactured. One friend remarked, upon examining the bottoms of Mickey's feet, "There's not very much wear on these!" I replied, "What do you expect? That he gets up and walks around?" Actually, it wouldn't surprise me if he did.



I pretty much know what's going on inside their heads, in the mechanical sense, as the one of the few signs of time and wear, when I got them, was the fact that they needed to be restrung. Minnie's eyes had become unhinged. They were two surprisingly large wooden ball-like things, rattling around inside her head. The inside is accessible through a circular hatch in the back, held in place by small brass screws. It is so well crafted that it is almost impossible to detect.

Both dolls have a some animation that is unique to each. Of course, both can tip and turn their heads. There is a latch inside that can lock the rod that animates them in place, I guess, for storage or traveling. And naturally, they have moveable mouths. And, quite incredibly, each has a wooden tongue that is balanced on some sort of counter weight, so it wags, automatically, in a most realistic way, when the dolls "speak".



Beyond these essential features, the dolls differ. The interior of Mickey's head is pretty much filled up by a complete set of wooden teeth that can be made to operate, in tandem with his jaw, to produce a toothy grin. Minnie, on the other hand, can open and close her eyes, together, or one at a time, to wink. She can do one more thing, or is intended to, at least. I had trouble restoring this, without damaging her flower, which is silk. There is a mechanism, inside the flower's stem, that, as far as I can tell, was intended to let it "wilt", at will. I'm afraid, It's, pretty much, permanently, wilted now.

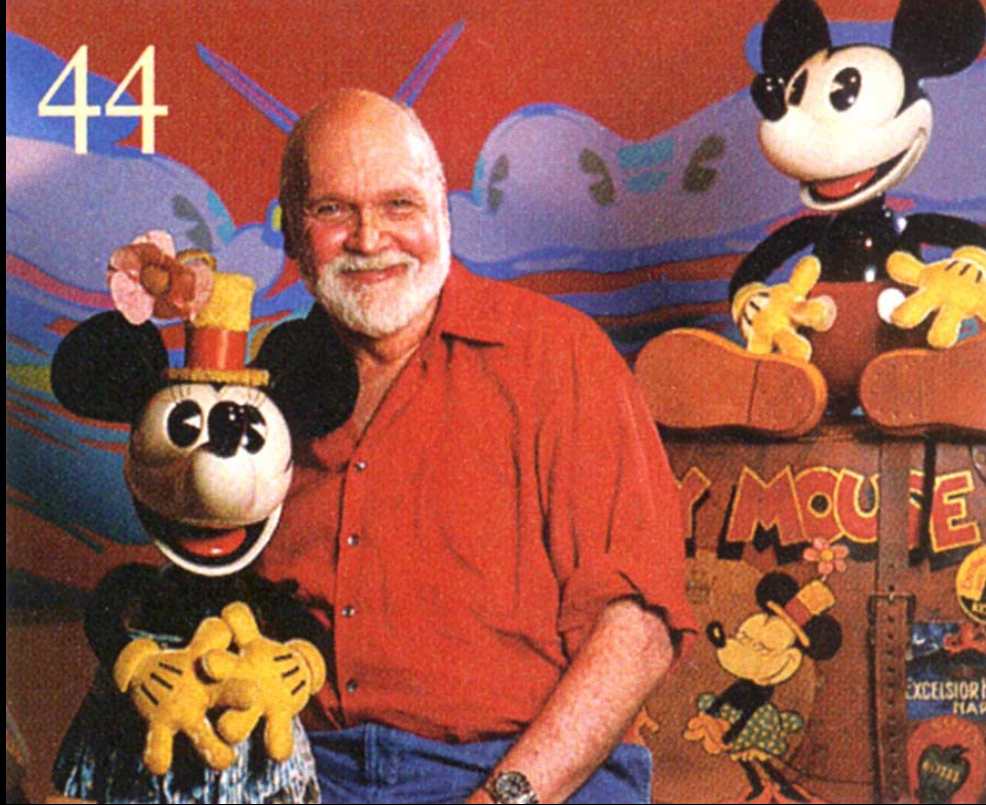
Dammit! In proof reading this, for the third time, I realized that I didn't photograph the features I just described! I guess, it's because they don't operate, without a hand inside. I suppose I should give it a try and insert the photograph, right here. OK! Here it is! I'm glad I did! It came out pretty great! These actions have been caught on video, but never as still photos, before. All these last minute additions are kind of overkill, but I'm not deleting any of the following stuff that I put in, before.



These Figures have been photographed, casually, over the years. There is this one terrific shot of just Mickey that was taken by the Disney folks for an article they did, a couple of years ago.



I wish they had given me a good copy of this one, below. It's the best photo I have seen of Minnie, and not bad of me. This is blown up from a small "table of contents" photo, in the Disney magazine.



And here they are, newly arrived, hanging out and kibitzing, while I was working an "Baby Face", some 20 years ago. Noel remarked that this photograph looked posed! Guess what! It was. Perhaps, "Willie Weenie" on the hot waxer, is a bit too much.



The dolls have had quite a history, since they have been here. Here is our friend, filmmaker Kenneth Anger, photographing them for a scene in his movie, "Mouse Heaven", after which this web site is named.



And here is a pleasant photo that I shot, between “takes”, on that occasion. Mickey and Minnie were sitting, side by side, where they stay most of the time. On this day, a ray of sunlight was pouring through the window, bathing them in light. Whenever I think of them, this image comes to mind



This has turned out to be a fun day. Mickey and Minnie were in a mood to cooperate, and that made taking a few new photos easy. I can't believe I've never made a serious attempt to photograph them, properly, before. They are very photogenic, and I could easily do more. I could sense they felt at home inside that trunk. After all, it was their hiding place, for many years. But they also made it clear that they don't want to stay in there. They dread the day, and so do I, when hands, other than mine, will place them in the trunk, again, and shut the lid, for there is no telling who will open it, or when.



I was sitting here, not altogether happy with the way this page was ending. Somehow, it seemed incomplete. I thought about photographing the backside of the trunk, "The End." Get it? Groan! Forgive me, I am old. It's been a long time since I looked at it. So, I went downstairs into the darkened room, and turned on a single light. The mice were still in the trunk, sitting upright. I took them out and set them on the couch. Then, I closed the trunk, strapped it up, and turned it around. The backside was just "all right." But there was nothing about it that said Mickey Mouse... In the darkness behind me, or was it in the back of my head, a small voice said, "What about us? Can't we be in the picture too?"

Great Idea! Absolutely! I picked them up and placed them in the front. They were unusually cooperative, and sat there, balanced perfectly, on the first try. I left the lighting as it was, set the tripod down intuitively, and, without my close-up glasses, so I couldn't see what I was doing, clicked a shot. Then, I went upstairs, and got my glasses, moved the mice just right, added more light, framed the camera, moved in closer, bracketed the exposures, and 30 pictures later, I came upstairs, camera card in hand, to the computer. The first photo was, far and away, superior. I think the mice were helping me. And here it is:

Mickey and Minnie, together, studying their travel stickers, and dreaming of the fabled places they have seen. Did they really visit these exotic cities, and stay in all those posh hotels? Could one mark these locations on a map of Europe, connect the dots, and trace their history? Or are they merely stickers on a trunk? Only the mice can say. And, what is the significance of the crown emblem on the front? This, too, will remain a mystery, for Mickey and Minnie lost their voice, in 1938... And 53 years later, they found me.



Continue to

MOUSE HEAVEN

VOLUME THREE

from UPPER CASES



to SONNY HATFIELD



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